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THE GUESTS OF HERCULES

BOOKS BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

THE GOLDEN SILENCE
THE MOTOR MAID
LORD LOVELAND DISCOVERS AMERICA
SET IN SILVER
THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR
THE PRINCESS PASSES
MY FRIEND THE CHAUFFEUR
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ILLUSTRATIONS

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"MARY WAS A GODDESS ON A GOLDEN PINNACLE. THIS WAS LIFE; THE WINE OF LIFE"

THE GUESTS OF HERCULES

BY C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of "The Motor Maid," "Lord Loveland Discovers America," "Lady Betty Across the Water," etc.



WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY M. LEONE BRACKER
AND
ARTHUR H. BUCKLAND

A. L. BURT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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TO

THE LORD OF THE GARDEN

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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I

THE GUESTS OF HERCULES

Long shadows of late afternoon lay straight and thin across the garden path; shadows of beech trees that ranged themselves in an undeviating line, like an inner wall within the convent wall of brick; and the soaring trees were very old, as old perhaps as the convent itself, whose stone had the same soft tints of faded red and brown as the autumn leaves which sparsely jewelled the beeches' silver.

A tall girl in the habit of a novice walked the path alone, moving slowly across the stripes of sunlight and shadow which inlaid the gravel with equal bars of black and reddish gold. There was a smell of autumn on the windless air, bitter yet sweet; the scent of dying leaves, and fading flowers loth to perish, of rose-berries that had usurped the place of roses, of chrysanthemums chilled by frost, of moist earth deprived of sun, and of the green moss-like film overgrowing all the trunks of the old beech trees. The novice was saying goodbye to the convent garden, and the long straight path under the wall, where every day for many years she had walked, spring and summer, autumn and winter; days of rain, days of sun, days of boisterous wind, days of white feathery snow — all the days through

which she had passed, on her way from childhood to womanhood. Best of all, she had loved the garden and her favourite path in spring, when vague hopes like dreams stirred in her blood, when it seemed that she could hear the whisper of the sap in the veins of the trees, and the crisp stir of the buds as they unfolded. She wished that she could have been going out of the garden in the brightness and fragrance of spring. The young beauty of the world would have been a good omen for the happiness of her new life. The sorrowful incense of Nature in decay cast a spell of sadness over her, even of fear, lest after all she were doing a wrong thing, making a mistake which could never be amended.

The spirit of the past laid a hand upon her heart. Ghosts of sweet days gone long ago beckoned her back to the land of vanished hours. The garden was the garden of the past; for here, within the high walls draped in flowering creepers and ivy old as history, past, present, and future were all as one, and had been so for many a tranquil generation of calm-faced, dark-veiled women. Suddenly a great homesickness fell upon the novice like an iron weight. She longed to rush into the house, to fling herself at Reverend Mother's feet, and cry out that she wanted to take back her decision, that she wanted everything to be as it had been before. But it was too late to change. What was done, was done.

Deliberately, she had given up her home, and all the kind women who had made the place home for her, from the time when she was a child eight

years old until now, when she was twenty-four. Sixteen years! It was a lifetime. Memories of her child-world before convent days were more like dreams than memories of real things that had befallen her, Mary Grant. And yet, on this her last day in the convent, recollections of the first were crystal clear, as they never had been in the years that lay between.

Her father had brought her a long way, in a train. Something dreadful had happened, which had made him stop loving her. She could not guess what, for she had done nothing wrong so far as she knew: but a few days before, her nurse, a kind old woman of a comfortable fatness, had put her into a room where her father was and gently shut the door, leaving the two alone together. Mary had gone to him expecting a kiss, for he was always kind, though she did not feel that she knew him well — only a little better, perhaps, than the radiant young mother whom she seldom saw for more than five minutes at a time. But instead of kissing her as usual, he had turned upon her a look of dislike, almost of horror, which often came to her afterward, in dreams. Taking the little girl by the shoulder not ungently, but very coldly, and as if he were in a great hurry to be rid of her, he pushed rather than led her to the door. Opening it, he called the nurse, in a sharp, displeased voice. "I don't want the child," he said. "I can't have her here. Don't bring her to me again without being asked." Then the kind, fat old woman had caught Mary in her arms and carried

her upstairs, a thing that had not happened for years. And in the nursery the good creature had cried over the "poor bairn" a good deal, mumbling strange things which Mary could not understand. But a few words had lingered in her memory, something about its being cruel and unjust to visit the sins of others on innocent babies. A few days afterward Mary's father, very thin and strange-looking, with hard lines in his handsome brown face, took her with him on a journey, after nurse had kissed her many times with streaming tears. At last they had got out of the train into a carriage, and driven a long way. At evening they had come to a tall, beautiful gateway, which had carved stone animals on high pillars at either side. That was the gate of the Convent of Saint Ursula-of-the-Lake, the gate of Mary's home-to-be: and in a big, bare parlour, with long windows and a polished oak floor that reflected curious white birds and dragons of an escutcheon on the ceiling, Reverend Mother had received them. She had taken Mary on her lap; and when, after much talk about school and years to come, the child's father had gone, shadowy, dark-robed women had glided softly into the room. They had crowded round the little girl, like children round a new doll, petting and murmuring over her: and she had been given cake and milk, and wonderful preserved fruit, such as she had never tasted.

Some of those dear women had gone since then, not as she was going, out into an unknown, maybe disappointing, world, but to a place where happiness

was certain, according to their faith. Mary had not forgotten one of the kind faces — and all those who remained she loved dearly; yet she was leaving them to-day. Already it was time. She had wished to come out into the garden alone for this last walk, and to wear the habit of her novitiate, though she had voluntarily given up the right to it forever. She must go in and dress for the world, as she had not dressed for years which seemed twice their real length. She must go in, and bid them all goodbye — Reverend Mother, and the nuns, and novices, and the schoolgirls, of whose number she had once been.

She stood still, looking toward the far end of the path, her back turned toward the gray face of the convent.

"Goodbye, dear old sundial, that has told so many of my hours," she said. "Goodbye, sweet rose-trees that I planted, and all the others I've loved so long. Goodbye, dear laurel bushes, that know my thoughts. Goodbye, everything."

Her arms hung at her sides, lost in the folds of her veil. Slowly tears filled her eyes, but did not fall until a delicate sound of light-running feet on grass made her start, and wink the tears away. They rolled down her white cheeks in four bright drops, which she hastily dried with the back of her hand; and no more tears followed. When she was sure of herself, she turned and saw a girl running to her from the house, a pretty, brown-haired girl in a blue dress that looked very frivolous and worldly in contrast to Mary's habit. But the bushes and the

sundial, and the fading flowers that tapestried the ivy on the old wall, were used to such frivolities. Generations of schoolgirls, taught and guarded by the Sisters of Saint Ursula-of-the-Lake, had played and whispered secrets along this garden path.

"Dearest Mary!" exclaimed the girl in blue. "I begged them to let me come to you just for a few minutes — a last talk. Do you mind?"

Mary had wanted to be alone, but suddenly she was glad that, after all, this girl was with her. "You call me 'Mary'!" she said. "How strange it seems to be Mary again — almost wrong, and — frightening."

"But you're not Sister Rose any longer," the girl in blue answered. "There's nothing remote about you now. You're my dear old chum, just as you used to be. And will you please begin to be frivolous by calling me Peter?"

Mary smiled, and two round dimples showed themselves in the cheeks still wet with tears. She and this girl, four years younger than herself, had begun to love each other dearly in school days, when Mary Grant was nineteen, and Mary Maxwell fifteen. They had gone on loving each other dearly till the elder Mary was twenty-one, and the younger seventeen. Then Molly Maxwell — who named herself "Peter Pan" because she hated the thought of growing up — had to go back to her home in America and "come out," to please her father, who was by birth a Scotsman, but who had made his money in New York. After three gay seasons she had begged to return for six months to school, and

see her friend Mary Grant — Sister Rose — before the final vows were taken. Also she had wished to see another Mary, who had been almost equally her friend ("the three Maries" they had always been called, or "the Queen's Maries"); but the third of the three Maries had disappeared, and about her going there was a mystery which Reverend Mother did not wish to have broken.

"Peter," Sister Rose echoed obediently, as the younger girl clasped her arm, making her walk slowly toward the sundial at the far end of the path.

"It does sound good to hear you call me that again," Molly Maxwell said. "You've been so stiff and different since I came back and found you turned into Sister Rose. Often I've been sorry I came. And now, when I've got three months still to stay, you're going to leave me. If only you could have waited, to change your mind!"

"If I had waited, I couldn't have changed it at all," Sister Rose reminded her. "You know ——"

"Yes, I know. It was the eleventh hour. Another week, and you would have taken your vows. Oh, I don't mean what I said, dear. I'm glad you're going — thankful. You hadn't the vocation. It would have killed you."

"No. For here they make it hard for novices on purpose, so that they may know the worst there is to expect, and be sure they're strong enough in body and heart. I wasn't fit. I feared I wasn't ——"

"You weren't — that is, your body and heart

are fitted for a different life. You'll be happy, very happy."

"I wonder?" Mary said, in a whisper.

"Of course you will. You'll tell me so when we meet again, out in my world that will be your world, too. I wish I were going with you now, and I could, of course. Only I had to beg the pater so hard to let me come here, I'd be ashamed to cable him that I wanted to get away before the six months were up. He wouldn't understand how different everything is because I'm going to lose you."

"In a way, you would have lost me if — if I'd stayed, and — everything had been as I expected."

"I know. They've let you be with me more as a novice than you could be as a professed nun. Still, you'd have been under the same roof. I could have seen you often. But I *am* glad. I'm not thinking of myself. And we'll meet just as soon as we can, when my time's up here. Father's coming back to his dear native Fifeshire to fetch me, and I'll make him take me to you, wherever you are, or else you'll visit me; better still. But it seems a long time to wait, for I really *did* come back here to be a 'parlour boarder,' a heap more to see you than for any other reason. And, besides, there's another thing. Only I hardly know how to say it, or whether I dare say it at all."

Sister Rose looked suddenly anxious, as if she were afraid of something that might follow. "What is it?" she asked quickly, almost sharply. "You must tell me."

"Why, it's nothing to *tell* — exactly. It's only this: I'm worried. I'm glad you're not going to be a nun all your life, dear; delighted — enchanted. You're given back to me. But — I worry because I can't help feeling that I've got something to do with the changing of your mind so suddenly; that if ever you should regret anything — not that you will, but if you should — you might blame me, hate me, perhaps."

"I never shall do either, whatever happens," the novice said, earnestly and gravely. She did not look at her friend as she spoke, though they were so nearly of the same height as they walked, their arms linked together, that they could gaze straight into one another's eyes. Instead, she looked up at the sky, through the groined gray ceiling of tree-branches, as if offering a vow. And seeing her uplifted profile with its pure features and clear curve of dark lashes, Peter thought how beautiful she was, of a beauty quite unearthly, and perhaps unsuited to the world. With a pang, she wondered if such a girl would not have been safer forever in the convent where she had lived most of her years. And though she herself was four years younger, she felt old and mature, and terribly wise compared with Sister Rose. An awful sense of responsibility was upon her. She was afraid of it. Her pretty blond face, with its bright and shrewd gray eyes, looked almost drawn, and lost the fresh colour that made the little golden freckles charming as the dust of flower-pollen on her rounded cheeks.

"But I *have* got something to do with it, haven't I?" she persisted, longing for contradiction, yet certain that it would not come.

"I hardly know — to be quite honest," Mary answered. "I don't know what I might have done if you hadn't come back and told me things about your life, and all your travels with your father — things that made me tingle. Maybe I should never have had the courage without that incentive. But, Peter, I'll tell you something I couldn't have told you till to-day. Since the very beginning of my novitiate I was never happy, never at rest."

"Truly? You wanted to go, even then, for two whole years?"

"I don't know what I wanted. But suddenly all the sweet calm was broken. You've often looked out from the dormitory windows over the lake, and seen how a wind springing up in an instant ruffles the clear surface. It's just like a mirror broken into a thousand tiny fragments. Well, it was so with me, with my spirit. And after all these years, when I'd been so contented, so happy that I couldn't even bear, as a schoolgirl, to go away for two or three days to visit Lady MacMillan in the holidays, without nearly dying of homesickness before I could be brought back! As a postulant I was just as happy, too. You know, I wouldn't go out into the world to try my resolve, as Reverend Mother advised. I was so sure there could be no home for me but this. Then came the change. Oh, Peter, I hope it wasn't the legacy! I pray I'm not so mean as that!"

"How long was it after your novitiate began that the money was left you?" Peter asked: for this was the first intimate talk alone and undisturbed that she had had with her old school friend since coming back to the convent three months ago. She knew vaguely that a cousin of Mary's dead father had left the novice money, and that it had been unexpected, as the lady was not a Roman Catholic, and had relations just as near, of her own religion. But Peter did not quite know when the news had come, or what had happened then.

"It was the very next day. That was odd, wasn't it? Though I don't know, exactly, why it should have seemed odd. It had to happen on some day. Why not that one? I was glad I should have a good dowry — quite proud to be of some use to the convent. I didn't think what I might have done for myself, if I'd been in the world — not then. But afterward, thoughts crept into my head. I used to push them out again as fast as they crawled in, and I told myself what a good thing I had a safe refuge, remembering my father, what he wrote about himself, and my mother."

For a moment she was silent. There was no need to explain, for Peter knew all about the terrible letter that had come from India with the news of Major Grant's death. It had arrived before Mary resolved to take vows, while she was still a fellow schoolgirl of Peter's, older than most of the girls, looked up to and adored, and probably it had done more than anything else to decide her that

she had a "vocation." Mary had told about the letter at the time, with stormy tears: how her father in dying wrote down the story of the past, as a warning to his daughter, whom he had not loved; told the girl that her mother had run away with one of his brother officers; that he, springing from a family of reckless gamblers, had himself become a gambler; that he had thrown away most of his money; and that his last words to Mary were, "You have wild blood in your veins. Be careful: don't let it ruin your life, as two other lives have been ruined before you."

"Then," Mary went on, while Peter waited, "for a few weeks, or a few days, I would be more peaceful. But the restlessness always came again. And, after the end of the first year, it grew worse. I was never happy for more than a few hours together. Still I meant to fight till the end. I never thought seriously of giving it up."

"Until after I came?" Peter broke in.

"Oh, I was happier for a while after you came. You took my mind off myself."

"And turned it to *my*self, or, rather, to the world I lived in. I'm glad, yes, I'm glad, I was in time, and yet — oh, Mary, you *won't* go to Monte Carlo, will you?"

Mary stopped short in her walk, and turned to face Peter.

"Why do you say that?" she asked, sharply. "What can make you think of Monte Carlo?"

"Only, you seemed so interested in hearing me

tell about staying with father at Stellamare, my cousin's house. You asked me such a lot of questions about it and about the Casino, more than about any other place, even Rome. And you looked excited when I told you. Your cheeks grew red. I noticed then, but it didn't matter, because you were going to live here always, and be a nun. Now ——"

"Now what does it matter?" the novice asked, almost defiantly. "Why should it occur to me to go to Monte Carlo?"

"Only because you were interested, and perhaps I may have made the Riviera seem even more beautiful and amusing than it really is. And besides — if it should be true, what your father was afraid of ——"

"What?"

"That you inherit his love of gambling. Oh, I couldn't bear it, darling, to think *I* had sent you to Monte Carlo."

"He didn't know enough about me to know whether I inherited anything from him or not. I hardly understand what gambling means, except what you've told me. It's only a word like a bird of ill omen. And what you said about the play at the Casino didn't interest me as other things did. It didn't sound attractive at all."

"It's different when you're there," Peter said.

"I don't think it would be for me. I'm almost sure I'm not like that — if I can be sure of anything about myself. Perhaps I can't! But you described

the place as if it were a sort of paradise — and all the Riviera. You said you would go back in the spring with your father. You didn't seem to think it wicked and dangerous for yourself."

"Monte Carlo isn't any more wicked than other places, and it's dangerous only for born gamblers," Peter argued. "I'm not one. Neither is my father, except in Wall Street. He plays a little for fun, that's all. And my cousin Jim Schuyler never goes near the Casino except for a concert or the opera. But *you* — all alone there — you who know no more of life than a baby! It doesn't bear thinking of."

"Don't think of it," said Mary, rather dryly. "I have no idea of going to Monte Carlo."

"Thank goodness! Well, I only wanted to be sure. I couldn't help worrying. Because, if anything had drawn you there, it would have been my fault. You would hardly have heard of Monte Carlo if it hadn't been for my stories. A cloistered saint like you!"

"Is that the way you think of me in these days?" The novice blushed and smiled, showing her friendly dimples. "I wish I felt a saint."

"You are one. And yet" — Peter gazed at her with sudden keenness — "I don't believe you were *made* to be a saint. It's the years here that have moulded you into what you are. But, there's something different underneath."

"Nothing very bad, I hope?" Mary looked actually frightened, as if she did not know herself, and feared an unfavourable opinion, which might be true.

"No, indeed. But different — quite a different *You* from what any of us, even yourself, have ever seen. It will come out. Life will bring it out."

"You talk," said Mary, "as if you were older than I."

"So I am, in every way except years, and they count least. Oh, Mary, how I do wish I were going with you!"

"So do I. And yet perhaps it will be good for me to begin alone."

"You won't be alone."

"No. Of course, there will be Lady MacMillan taking me to London. And afterward there'll be my aunt and cousin. But I've never seen them since I was too tiny to remember them at all, except that my cousin Elinor had a lovely big doll she wouldn't let me touch. It's the same as being alone, going to them. I shall have to get acquainted with them and the world at the same time."

"Are you terrified?"

"A little. Oh, a good deal! I think now, at the last moment, I'd take everything back, and stay, if I could."

"No, you wouldn't, if you had the choice, and you saw the gates closing on you — forever. You'd run out."

"I don't know. Perhaps. But how I shall miss them all! Reverend Mother, and the sisters, and you, and the garden, and looking out over the lake far away to the mountains."

"But there'll be other mountains."

"Yes, other mountains."

"Think of the mountains of Italy."

"Ch, I do. When the waves of regret and homesickness come I cheer myself with thoughts of Italy. Ever since I can remember, I've wanted Italy; ever since I began to study history and look at maps, and even to read the lives of the saints, I've cared more about Italy than any other country. When I expected to spend all my life in a convent, I used to think that maybe I could go to the mother-house in Italy for a while some day. You can't realize, Peter — you, who have lived in warm countries — how I've pined for warmth. I've *never* been warm enough, never in my life, for more than a few hours together. Even in summer it's never really hot here, never hot with the glorious burning heat of the sun that I long to feel. How I do want to be warm, all through my veins. I've wanted it always. Even at the most sacred hours, when I ought to have forgotten that I had a body, I've shivered and yearned to be warm — warm to the heart. I shall go to Italy and bask in the sun."

"Marie used to say that, too, that she wanted to be warm," Peter murmured in an odd, hesitating, shamefaced way. And she looked at the novice intently, as she had looked before. Mary's white cheeks were faintly stained with rose, and her eyes dilated. Peter had never seen quite the same expression on her face, or heard quite the same ring in her voice. The girl felt that the different, unknown

self she had spoken of was beginning already to waken and stir in the nun's soul.

"Marie!" Sister Rose repeated. "It's odd you should have spoken of Marie. I've been thinking about her lately. I can't get her out of my head. And I've dreamed of seeing her — meeting her unexpectedly somewhere."

"Perhaps she's been thinking of you, wherever she is, and you feel her mind calling to yours. I believe in such things, don't you?"

"I never thought much about them before, I suppose because I've had so few people outside who were likely to think of me. No one but you. Or perhaps Marie, if she ever does think of old times. I wish I could meet her, not in dreams, but really."

"Queerer things have happened. And if you're going to travel you can't tell but you may run across each other," said Peter. "I've sometimes caught myself wondering whether I should see her in New York, for there it's like London and Monte Carlo — the most unexpected people are always turning up."

"Is Monte Carlo like that?" Mary asked, with the quick, only half-veiled curiosity which Peter had noticed in her before when relating her own adventures on the Riviera.

"Yes. More than any other place I've ever been to in the world. Every one comes — anything can happen — there. But I don't want to talk about Monte Carlo. You really wouldn't find it half as interesting as your beloved Italy. And I shouldn't

like to think of poor Marie drifting there, either — Marie as she must be now."

"I used to hope," Mary said, "that she might come back here, after everything turned out so dreadfully for her, and that she'd decide to take the vows with me. Reverend Mother would have welcomed her gladly, in spite of all. She loved Marie. So did the sisters; and though none of them ever talk about her — at least, to me — I feel sure they haven't forgotten, or stopped praying for her."

"Do you suppose they guess that we found out what really happened to Marie, after she ran away?" Peter wanted to know.

"I hardly think so. You see, we couldn't have found out if it hadn't been for Janet Churchill, the one girl in school who didn't live in the convent. And Janet wasn't a bit the sort they would expect to know such things."

"Or about anything else. Her stolidity was a very useful pose. You'd find it a useful one, too, darling, 'out in the world,' as you call it; but you'll never be clever in that way, I'm afraid."

"In what way?"

"In hiding things you feel. Or in not feeling things that are uncomfortable to feel."

"Don't frighten me!" Mary exclaimed. They had walked to the end of the path, and were standing by the sundial. She turned abruptly, and looked with a certain eagerness toward the far-off façade of the convent, with its many windows. On the leaded panes of those in the west wing the sun

still lingered, and struck out glints as of rubies in a gold setting. All the other windows were in shadow now. "We must go in," Mary said. "Lady MacMillan will be coming soon, and I have lots to do before I start."

"What have you to do, except to dress?"

"Oh! — to say goodbye to them all. And it seems as if I could never finish saying goodbye."

Peter did not meet her friend again after they had gone into the house until Mary had laid away the habit of Sister Rose the novice and put on the simple gray travelling frock in which Mary Grant was to go "out into the world." Peter had been extremely curious to see her in this, for it was three years ago and more since she had last had a sight of Mary in "worldly dress." That was on the day when Molly Maxwell had left the convent as a schoolgirl, to go back to America with her father; and almost immediately Mary Grant had given up such garments, as she thought forever, in becoming a postulant.

Not since then had Peter seen Mary's hair, which by this time would have been cut close to her head if she had not suddenly discovered, just in time, that she had "lost her vocation." Mary had beautiful hair. All the girls in school had admired it. Peter had hated to think of its being cut off; and lately, since the sudden change in Mary's mind, the American girl had wondered if the peculiar, silvery blond had darkened. It would be a pity if it had, for her hair had been one of Mary's chief

beauties, and if it had changed she would not be as lovely as of old, particularly as she had lost the brilliant bloom of colour she had had as a schoolgirl, her cheeks becoming white instead of pink roses.

It seemed to Peter that she could not remember exactly what Mary had been like, in those first days, for the novice's habit had changed her so strangely, seeming to chill her warm humanity, turning a lovely, glowing young girl into a beautiful marble saint. But under the marble, warm blood had been flowing, and a hot, rebellious heart throbbing, after all. Peter delighted in knowing that this was true, though she was anxious about the statue coming to life and walking out of its sheltered niche. When she was called to say goodbye formally, with other friends who had loved Mary as schoolgirl and novice, Peter's own heart was beating fast.

The instant she caught sight of the tall, slight, youthful-looking figure in gray, the three years fell away like a crumbling wall, and gave back the days of the "three Maries." No, the silvery blond hair had not faded or lost its sparkle.

Mary Grant, in her short gray skirt and coat, with her lovely hair in an awkwardly done clump at the nape of a slender neck, looked a mere schoolgirl. She was twenty-four, and nearing her twenty-fifth birthday. Of late, she had had anxieties and vigils, and the life of a novice of Saint Ursula-of-the-Lake was not lived on down or roses: but the tranquil years of simple food, of water-drinking, of garden-work, of quiet thinking and praying had passed



MARY GRANT

II

Lady MacMillan of Linlochtry Castle, who was a devout Catholic, came often from her place in the neighbourhood to see her half-sister, Mother Superior at the Convent of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake. Mary Grant's only knowledge of the world outside the convent had been given her by Lady MacMillan, with whom when a schoolgirl she had sometimes spent a few days, and might have stopped longer if she had not invariably been seized by pangs of homesickness. Lady MacMillan's household, to be sure, did not afford many facilities for forming an opinion of the world at large, though a number of carefully selected young people had been entertained for Mary's benefit. Its mistress was an elderly widow, and had been elderly when the child saw her first: but occasionally, before she became a postulant, Mary had been taken to Perth to help Lady MacMillan do a little shopping; and once she had actually stayed from Saturday to Tuesday at Aberdeen, where she had been to the theatre. This was a memorable event; and the sisters at the convent had never tired of hearing the fortunate girl describe her exciting experiences, for theirs was an enclosed order, and it was years since most of them had been outside the convent gates.

Lady MacMillan was a large, very absent-minded and extremely near-sighted lady, like her half-sister, Mary's adored Reverend Mother; but neither so warm-hearted nor so intelligent. Still, Mary was used to this old friend, and fond of her as well. It was not like going away irrevocably from all she knew and loved, to be going under Lady MacMillan's wing. Still, she went weeping, wondering how she had ever made up her mind to the step, half passionately grateful to Reverend Mother for not being angry with her weakness and lack of faith, half regretful that some one in authority had not thought it right to hold her forcibly back.

There was no railway station within ten miles of the old convent by the lake. Lady MacMillan came from her little square box of a castle still farther away, in the old-fashioned carriage which she called a "barouche," drawn by two satin-smooth, fat animals, more like tightly covered yet comfortable brown sofas than horses.

It was a great excitement for Lady MacMillan to be going to London, and a great exertion, but she did not grudge trouble for Mary Grant. Not that she approved of the girl's leaving the convent. It was Reverend Mother who had to persuade her half-sister that, if Mary had not the vocation, it was far better that she should read her own heart in time, and that the girl was taking with her the blessings and prayers of all those who had once hoped to keep their dear one with them forever. Still it was the greatest sensation the convent had known, that

Mary should be going; and Reverend Mother would not let her half-sister even mention, in that connection, the name of the other Mary — or Marie — Grant, who also had gone away sensationally. The eldest of the "three Maries," the three prettiest, most remarkable girls in the convent school, had left mysteriously, in a black cloud of disgrace. She had run off to join a lover who had turned out to be a married man, unable to make her his wife, even if he wished; and sad, vague tidings of the girl had drifted back to the convent since, as spray from the sea is blown a long way on the wind.

Reverend Mother would not hear Lady MacMillan say, "Strange that the two Mary Grants should be the only young women to leave you, except in the ordinary way," the ordinary way being the end of school days for a girl, or the end of life for a nun.

"I want dear Mary to be happy in the manner that's best for her," answered the good woman, whose outlook was very wide, though her orbit was limited. "If it had been best for Mary to stay with us, she would have stayed; or else some day, when she has learned enough to know that the world can be disappointing, she will return. If that day ever comes, she'll have a warm welcome, and it will be a great joy to us all; but the next best thing will be hearing that she is happy in her new life; and she promises to write often." Then the clever lady proceeded to ask advice about Mary's wardrobe. Should the girl do such shopping as she must do in

Aberdeen, or should she wait and trust to the taste of Mrs. Home-Davis, the widowed aunt in London, who had agreed to take charge of her?

The question had fired Lady MacMillan to excitement, as Reverend Mother knew it would. Lady MacMillan believed that she had taste in dress. She was entirely mistaken in this idea; but that was not the point. Nothing so entranced her as to give advice, and the picture of an unknown aunt choosing clothes for Mary was unbearable. She made up her mind at once that she would escort her young friend to London, and stay long enough at some quiet hotel in Cromwell Road to see Mary "settled." Mrs. Home-Davis lived in Cromwell Road; and it was an extra incentive to Lady MacMillan that she would not be too far from the Oratory.

It was evening when the two arrived at King's Cross Station, after the longest journey Mary had ever made. There was a black fog, cold and heavy as a dripping fur coat. Out of its folds loomed motor omnibuses, monstrous mechanical demons such as Mary had never seen nor pictured. The noise and rush of traffic stunned her into silence, as she drove with her old friend in a four-wheeled cab toward Cromwell Road. There, she imagined, would be peace and quiet; but not so. They stopped before a house, past which a wild storm of motor-omnibuses and vans and taxicabs and private cars swept ceaselessly in two directions. It seemed impossible to Mary that people could live in such a place. She was supposed to stay for a month or two in London,

and then, if she still wished to see Italy, her aunt and cousin would make it convenient to go with her. But, before the dark green door behind Corinthian pillars had opened, the girl was resolving to hurry out of London somehow, anyhow, with or without her relatives. She decided this with the singular, silent intensity of purpose that she did not even know to be characteristic of herself, though it had carried her through a severe ordeal at the convent; for Mary had never yet studied her own emotions or her own nature. The instant that the Home-Davises, mother and daughter, greeted her in their chilly drawing-room, she lost all doubt as to whether she should leave London with or without them. It would be without them that she must go. How she was to contrive this, the girl did not know in the least, but she knew that the thing would have to be done. She could not see Italy in the company of these women.

Suddenly Mary remembered them both quite well, though they had not met since a visit the mother and daughter had made to Scotland when she was seven years old, before convent days. She recalled her aunt's way of holding out a hand, like an offering of cold fish. And she remembered how the daughter was patterned after the mother: large, light eyes, long features of the horse type, prominent teeth, thin, consciously virtuous-looking figure, and all the rest.

They had the sort of drawing-room that such women might be expected to have, of the coldest grays and greens, with no individuality of decoration.

The whole house was the same, cheerless and depressing even to those familiar with London in a November fog, but blighting to one who knew not London in any weather. Even the servants seemed cold, mechanical creatures, made of well-oiled steel or iron; and when Lady MacMillan had driven off to a hotel, Mary cried heartily in her own bleak room, with motor-omnibuses roaring and snorting under her windows.

At dinner, which was more or less cold, like everything else, there was talk of the cousin who had left Mary a legacy of fifty thousand pounds; and it was easy to divine in tone, if not in words, that the Home-Davises felt deeply aggrieved because the money had not come to them. This cousin had lived in the Cromwell Road house during the last invalid years of her life, and had given them to understand that Elinor was to have almost, if not quite, everything. The poor lady had died, it seemed, in the room which Mary now occupied, probably in the same bed. Mary deeply pitied her if she had been long in dying. The wall-paper was atrocious, with a thousand hideous faces to be worried out of it by tired eyes. The girl had wondered why the money had been left entirely to her, but now she guessed in a flash why the Home-Davises had had none of it. The years in this Cromwell house had been too long.

"We've always imagined that Cousin Katherine must have been in love with your father, Uncle Basil, before he married," said Elinor, when they

had reached the heavy stage of sweet pudding; "and when the will was read, we were sure of it. For, of course, mother was just as nearly related to her as uncle Basil was."

It was difficult for Mary to realize that this Aunt Sara could be a sister of the handsome, dark-faced man with burning eyes whose features had remained cameo-clear in her memory since childhood. But Mrs. Home-Davis was the ugly duckling of a handsome and brilliant family, an accident of fate which had embittered her youth, and indirectly her daughter's.

"How shall I get away from them?" Mary asked herself, desperately, that night. But fate was fighting for her in the form of a man she had never seen, a man not even in London at the moment.

In a room below Mary's Elinor was asking Mrs. Home-Davis how they could get rid of the convent cousin.

"She won't do," the young woman said.

"She reminds me of her mother," remarked Mrs. Home-Davis. "I thought she would grow up like that."

"Yet there's a look in her eyes of Uncle Basil," Elinor amended, brushing straight hair of a nondescript brown, which she admired because it was long.

"With such a combination of qualities as she'll probably develop, she'd much better have stayed in her convent," the elder woman went on.

"I wish to goodness she had," snapped Elinor.

"You are — er — thinking of Doctor Smythe, dear?"

"Ye-es — partly," the younger admitted, reluctantly; for there was humiliation to her vanity in the admission. "Not that Arthur 'd care for that type of girl, particularly, or that he'd be disloyal to me — if he were let alone. But you can see for yourself, mother — *is* she the kind that will let men alone? At dinner she made eyes even at the footman. I was watching her."

"She can't have met any men, unless at that old Scotchwoman's house," replied Mrs. Home-Davis. "Perhaps even their Romish consciences would have forced them to show her a few, before she took her vows — Catholic young men, of course."

"Perhaps one of them decided her to break the vows."

"She hasn't really broken them, you know, Elinor. We must be just."

"Well, anyhow, she hasn't the air of an engaged person. And if she's here when Arthur gets back to London, I feel in my bones, mother, there'll be ructions."

"Authur" was Doctor Smythe, a man not very young, whom Elinor Home-Davis had known for some time; but it was only lately that she had begun to hope he might ask her to marry him. She valued him, for he was the one man she had ever succeeded in attracting seriously, and though she knew he would not think of proposing if she had not some money which would be helpful in his career, she was

eager to accept him. Had she realized sooner that there was a chance with Arthur Smythe, she would not have let her mother make that promise concerning Italy, for she could not be left alone in London all winter. Arthur Smythe would think that too strange; yet now she would not go out of England for anything. He was in Paris attending a medical congress, and planned afterward to visit the châteaux country with a friend; but he would be back in two or three weeks. Now that Elinor had seen Mary, she felt that changes must be made quickly. In other circumstances, it would have been pleasant to loiter about Italy, stopping at the best hotels at Mary's expense, on money that ought to have been the Home-Davises; but as it was, Elinor could think of nothing better to do than to send Mary off by herself, in a hurry. Or, as Mrs. Home-Davis said, "some one suitable" might be travelling at the right time, and they could perhaps find an excuse for stopping at home themselves.

"You can be ill, if necessary," suggested Elinor.

"Yes, I can be ill, if necessary — or you can," replied her mother.

Mary had not known that there could be such noise in the world as the noise of London. She did not sleep that night; and the fog was blacker than ever in the morning. Shopping had to be put off for three days; and then Lady MacMillan was too near-sighted and too absent-minded to be of much use. She was telegraphed for from her box of a castle, at the end of the week, because her house-

keeper was ailing — an old woman who was almost as much friend as servant. Mary would have given anything to return with her, even if to go back must mean retiring into the convent forever; but the gate of the past had gently shut behind her. She could not knock upon it for admittance, at least not until she had walked farther along the path of the future.

When Lady MacMillan had gone, Mrs. Home-Davis and Elinor showed no interest in the convent cousin. They went about their own concerns as if she did not exist, leaving her to go about hers, if she chose. They were both interested, they explained, in the Suffragist movement; also they had charities to look after. There was no time to bother with Mary's shopping, but of course she could have their maid, Jennings, to go out with: in fact, she must not attempt to go alone. Consequently, Mary bought only necessaries, in the big, confusing shops that glared white in the foggy twilight, for Jennings as a companion was more depressing than the cold. She was middle-aged, very pinched and respectable in appearance, with a red nose, always damp at the end; and she disapproved of lace and ribbons on underclothing. Mrs. Home-Davis and Miss Elinor would never think of buying such things as Miss Grant admired. Jennings would have pioneered Miss Grant to the British and South Kensington museums if Miss Grant had wished to go, but Mary had no appetite for museums in the dark and forbidding November, which was the worst that London had known for years. Her aunt never sug-

gested a theatre, or the opera, or anything which Mary was likely to find amusing, for a plan decided upon with Elinor was being faithfully carried out. The convent cousin was to be disgusted with Cromwell Road, and bored with London, so that she might be ready to snatch at the first excuse to get away. And once away, Mrs. Home-Davis promised Elinor to find some pretext for refusing to receive her back again.

The plan succeeded perfectly, though, had the ladies but guessed, no complicated manœuvres would have been necessary, Mary having determined upon escape in the moment of arrival. She was shut up in her room for a few days with a cold, after she had been a week in Cromwell Road, and when she was let out, after all danger of infection for her relatives had passed, she dared to propose Italy as a cure for herself.

"I know you have important engagements," Mary said, hastily, "and of course you couldn't go with me at such short notice; but I don't feel as if I could wait. I may be ill on your hands. I feel as if I should be, unless I run away where it's warm and bright."

Mrs. Home-Davis, much as she wanted to take the girl at her word, could not resist retorting: "It's not very bright and warm in Scotland at this time of year, yet you don't seem to have been ill there."

Mary could have replied that in the convent she had had the warmth and brightness of love, but she

merely mumbled that she had often taken cold in the autumn.

"It will be impossible for us to leave home at present," her aunt went on. "If you're determined to go, I must get you some one to travel with, or you must have an elderly maid-companion. Perhaps that would be best. One can't always find friends travelling at the time they're wanted."

"Mary isn't such a baby that she ought to need looking after," said Elinor. "She's nearly twenty-five — as old as I am — and you don't mind my going to Exeter alone."

Elinor was twenty-eight. When she was a child she had assumed airs of superiority on the strength of her age, Mary remembered, but now she and her cousin seemed suddenly to match their years. Mary was glad of this, however, and bolstered Elinor's argument by admitting her own maturity. "I don't want a companion-maid, please," she said, with the mingling of meekness and violent resolution which had ended her novitiate. "It will be better for my Italian, to get one in Italy. I shall be safe alone till I arrive. You see, Reverend Mother has given me a letter to the Superior in the mother-house, and other letters, too. I shall have friends in Florence and Rome, and lots of places."

"But it wouldn't look well for you to travel alone," Mrs. Home-Davis objected.

"Nobody will be looking at me. Nobody will know who I am," Mary argued. Then, desperately,

"Rather than you should find me a companion, Aunt Sara, I won't go to Italy at all. I ——"

She could have chosen no more efficacious threat; though if she had been allowed to finish her sentence, she would have added, "I'll go back to Scotland to Lady MacMillan's, or stay in the convent."

Thus the sting would have lost its venom for the Home-Davises, but Elinor, fearing disaster, cut the sentence short. "Oh, for mercy's sake, mother, let Mary have her own way," she broke in. "You can see she means to in the end, so why disturb yourself? Nothing can happen to her."

Elinor's eyes anxiously recalled to her mother a letter that had come from Doctor Smythe that morning announcing his return at the end of the week. It was providential that Mary should have proposed going, as it would have been awkward otherwise to get her out of the house in time; and Elinor was anxious that she should be taken at her word.

"It's more of appearances than danger that I'm thinking," Mrs. Home-Davis explained, retiring slowly, face to the enemy, yet with no real desire to win the battle. "Perhaps if I write Mrs. Larkin in Florence — a nice, responsible woman — to find a family for you to stay with, it may do. Only in that case, you mustn't stop before you get to Florence. I'll buy your ticket straight through, by the Mont Cenis."

"No, please," Mary protested, mildly. "Not that way. I've set my heart on going along the

Riviera, not to stop anywhere, but to see the coast from the train. It must be so lovely: and after this blackness to see the blue Mediterranean, and the flowers, and oranges, and the red rocks that run out into the sea; it's a dream of joy to think of it. I've a friend who has been twice with her father. She told me so much about the Riviera. It can't be much farther than the other way."

So it was settled, after some perfunctory objections on the part of Mrs. Home-Davis, who wished it put on record that she had been overruled by Mary's obstinacy. If undesirable incidents should happen, she wanted to say, "Mary *would* go by herself, without waiting for me. She's of age, and I couldn't coerce her."

III

MARY felt like an escaped prisoner as the train began to move out of Victoria Station — the train which was taking her toward France and Italy. It was like passing through a great gray gate, labeled "This way to warmth and sunshine and beauty." Already, though the gate itself was not beautiful, Mary seemed to see through it, far ahead, vistas of lovely places to which it opened. She sat calmly, as the moving carriage rescued her from Aunt Sara and Elinor on the platform, but her hands were locked tightly inside the five-year-old squirrel muff, which would have been given away, with everything of hers, if Sister Rose had not changed a certain decision at the eleventh hour. She was quivering with excitement and the wild sense of freedom which she had not tasted in London.

In leaving the convent she had not felt this sense of escaping, for the convent had been "home," the goodbyes had drowned her in grief, and she had often before driven off with Lady MacMillan, in the springy barouche behind the fat horses. Even the journey to London had not given her the thrill she hoped for, as rain had fallen heavily, blotting out the landscape. Besides, she had even then regarded her stay in London with the Home-Davises only as

a stage on the journey which was eventually to lead her into warmth and sunlight.

This train, with the foreign-looking people who rushed about chattering French and German, Italian and Arabic on the platform and in the corridors, seemed to link London mysteriously with other lands. Even the strong, active porters, who sprang at huge trunks piled on cabs, and carried them off to the weighing-room, were different from other porters, more important, part of a great scheme, and their actions added to her excitement. She liked the way that an alert guard put her into her compartment, as if he were posting a letter in a hurry, and had others to post. Then the great and sudden bustle of the train going out made her heart beat.

Mary had been brought to the station early, for Elinor had been nervous lest she might miss the train, and Doctor Smythe was coming at four o'clock that afternoon. But others who were to share the compartment were late. It was violently exciting to have them dash in at the last moment, and dispose of bags and thick rugs in straps to be used on the Channel.

They were two, mother and daughter perhaps; a delicate birdlike girl and a plump middle-aged woman with an air of extreme self-satisfaction.

In themselves they did not appear interesting, but Mary was interested, and wondered where they were going. When they took out fashion-papers and sixpenny novels, however, she felt that they were no longer worth attention. How could they

read, when they were saying goodbye to England, and when each minute the windows framed charming pictures of skimming Kentish landscape? The strangely shaped oast-houses puzzled Mary. She longed to ask what they were, but the woman and the girl seemed absorbed in their books and papers. Mary thought they must be dull and stupid; but suddenly it came to her that to many people, these among others, maybe, this journey was a commonplace, everyday affair. Even going to France or Italy might not be to them a high adventure. Extraordinary to reflect that all over the world men and women were travelling, going to wonderful new places, seeing wonderful new things, and taking it as a matter of course!

She had never seen the sea; and when the billowing fields and neat hedges changed to chalky downs, a sudden whiff of salt on the air blowing through a half-open window made her heart leap. She nearly cried, "The sea!" but controlled herself because of her prim fellow-passengers.

Mary would have been surprised if she had known their real feelings toward her, which were not as remote as she supposed.

She looked, they both thought, like a schoolgirl going abroad for her Christmas holidays, only it was early for holidays: but if she were a schoolgirl it was strange that she should be travelling alone. Her furs were old-fashioned and inexpensive, her gray tweed dress plain and without style, her hat had a home-made air, but from under the short skirt

peeped smart patent-leather shoes with silver buckles and pointed toes, and there was a glimpse of silk stockings thin as a mere polished film. A schoolgirl would not be allowed to have such shoes and stockings, which, in any case, were most unsuited to travelling. (Poor Mary had not known this, in replacing the convent abominations which had struck Peter as pathetic; and Mrs. Home-Davis had not troubled to tell her); nor would a schoolgirl be likely to have delicate gray suède gloves, with many buttons, or a lace handkerchief like a morsel of seafoam. These oddities in Mary's toilet, due to her inexperience and untutored shopping, puzzled her companions; and often, while she supposed them occupied with the fashions, they were stealing furtive glances at her clear, saintly profile, the full rose-red lips which contradicted its austerity, and the sparkling waves of hair meekly drawn down over the small ears. Her rapt expression, also, piqued their curiosity.

They were inclined to believe it a pose, put on to attract attention; and though they could not help acknowledging her beauty, they were far from sure that she was a person to be approved. At one instant the mother of the birdlike girl fancied her neighbour a child. The next, she was sure that the stranger was much more mature than she looked, or wished to look. And when, on leaving the train at Dover, Mary spoke French to a young Frenchman in difficulties with an English porter, the doubting hearts of her fellow-travellers closed against the

offender. With an accent like that, this was certainly not her first trip abroad, they decided. With raised eyebrows they telegraphed each other that they would not be surprised if she had an extremely intimate knowledge of Paris and Parisian ways.

Even the Frenchman she befriended was ungrateful enough not to know quite what to think of Mary. He raised his hat, and gave her a look of passionate gratitude, in case anything were to be got by it: but the deep meaning of the gaze was lost on the lately emancipated Sister Rose. She blushed, because it happened to be the first time she had ever spoken to a young man unchaperoned by Lady MacMillan: but she was regarding him as a fellow-being, and remembering that she had been instructed to seize any chance of doing a kindness, no matter how small. She had never been told that it was not always safe for a girl to treat a Frenchman as a fellow-being.

Afterward, on the boat, when a porter had placed her in a sheltered deck-seat with a curved top, the fellow-being ventured again to thank the English Mees for coming to his rescue. It was a pleasure to Mary to speak French, which had been taught her by Sister Marie-des-Anges, a French nun from Paris; and she and the young man plunged into an animated conversation. Her travelling companions had chairs on deck not far off, and they knew what to think of the mystery now. They were on the way to Mentone, but as they intended stopping a day in Paris, and going on by a cheaper train than

the *train de luxe*, Mary did not see them again during the journey.

She was unconscious of anything in her appearance or conduct to arouse disapproval. Her one regret concerning the thin silk stockings and delicate shoes (which she had bought because they were pretty) was that her ankles were cold. She had no rug; but the Frenchman insisted on lending her his, tucking it round her knees and under her feet. Then she was comfortable, and even more grateful to him than he had been to her for translating him to the porter. He was dark and thin, cynically intelligent looking, of a type new to Mary; and she thanked him for being disappointed that she could not stop in Paris. He inquired if, by chance, she were going to Monte Carlo. When she said no, she was passing on much farther, he was again disappointed, because, being an artist, he often ran down to Monte Carlo himself in the winter, and it would have been a great privilege to renew acquaintance with so charming an English lady.

Mary had feared that she might be ill in crossing the Channel, as she had never been on the water before, and could not know whether she were a good or a bad sailor. Aunt Sara and Elinor had told her unpleasant anecdotes of voyages; but when Dover Castle on its gray height, and white Shakespeare Cliff with its memories of "Lear," had faded from her following eyes, still she would hardly have known that the vessel was moving. The purring turbines scarcely thrilled the deck; and presently Mary ate

sandwiches and drank a decoction of coffee, brought by her new friend. He laughed when she started at a mournful hoot of the siren, and was enormously interested to hear that she had never set eyes upon the sea until to-day. Mademoiselle, for such an ingenue, was very courageous, he thought, and looked at Mary closely; but her eyes wandered from him to the phantom-shapes that loomed out of a pale, wintry mist: tramps thrashing their way to the North Sea: a vast, distant liner with tiers of decks one above the other: a darting torpedo-destroyer which flashed by like a streak of foam.

Everything was so interesting that Mary would far rather not have had to talk, but she had been brought up in a school of old-fashioned courtesy. To her, a failure in politeness would have been almost a crime: and as the sisters had never imagined the possibility of her talking with a strange young man, they had not cautioned her against doing so.

She had meant to scribble a few notes of her impressions during the journey, for the benefit of Reverend Mother and the nuns, posting her letter in Paris; but as the Frenchman appeared surprised at her travelling alone, and everybody else seemed to be with friends, she decided not to write until Florence. There, when she could say that she had reached her journey's end safely, she might confess that she had left London without her relatives or even the companion-maid they advised.

"If Reverend Mother saw Aunt Sara, even for

five minutes," Mary said to herself, "she couldn't blame me."

As it happened, there had been such a rush at the last, after the great decision was made, that Mary had not written to the convent. She had only telegraphed: "Leaving at once for Florence. Will write."

She was hoping that Reverend Mother would not scold her for what she had done, when suddenly another cliff, white as the cliffs of Dover, glimmered through the haze. Then she forgot her sackcloth, for, according to the Frenchman, this was old Grisnez, pushing its inquiring nose into the sea; and beyond loomed the tall lighthouse of Calais.

It was absurdly wonderful on landing at Calais to hear every one talking French. Of course, Mary had known that it would be so, but actually to hear it, and to think that these people had spoken French since they were babies, was ridiculously nice. She felt rewarded for all the pains she had taken to learn verbs and acquire exactly the right accent; and she half smiled in a friendly way at the dark porters in their blue blouses, and at the toylike policemen with their swords and capes. Her porter was a cross-looking, elderly man, but at the smile she had for him he visibly softened; and, with her dressing-bag slung by a strap over his broad shoulder, made an aggressive shield of his stout body to pilot her through the crowd.

Now she left behind the two Englishwomen and her French acquaintance, for she was a passenger in

the *luxe*, which started earlier than the ordinary first-class train for Paris. The Frenchman hoped and believed that she would regret his society, but she forgot him before the train went out, having no premonition of any future meeting.

This, then, was what they called a *wagon lit!* She was delighted with her quarters, supposing, as the compartment seemed small, that it was entirely for her use during the journey. She had been told that she would be provided with a bed, and she wondered how it was to be arranged.

Darkness fell over France, but Mary felt that she could see through the black veil, away to the south, where roses were budding in warm sunshine. She was whole-heartedly glad, for the first time, to be out of the convent.

If it had not been winter and night, she would perhaps have longed to stop in Paris, but the sight of the great bleak Gare du Nord chilled her. The ordeal of the *douane* had to be gone through there, and Mary was glad when it was over, and she could go on again, though she was once more protected by a gallant porter; and a youngish official of the customs, after a glance at her face, quickly marked crosses on her luggage without opening it. Other women, older and not attractive, saw this favouritism, and swelled with resentment, as Elinor Home-Davis had when saying:

"*Is* she the kind who can ever let men alone? She makes eyes at the footman!"

Mary had never heard of "making eyes."

One did not use these vulgar expressions at the convent. But Peter would have known what Elinor meant; and even Reverend Mother knew instinctively that, if Mary Grant went out into the world, she would unconsciously influence all sorts and conditions of men with whom she came in contact, as the moon influences the tides. And Reverend Mother would have felt it safer for just such creatures as Mary to live out their lives in the shelter of a convent. But Mary thought only how kind Frenchmen even of the lower classes were, and wondered if those of other nations were as polite. Slowly the train took her round Paris, and, after what seemed a long time, stopped in another huge station, which shivered under a white, crude flood of electric light. Its name — Gare du Lyon — sounded warm, however, and sent her fancy flying southward again. She was growing impatient to get on when, to her surprise, a porter hovering in the corridor with a large dressing-bag plumped it into the rack beside her own. Mary started. Could it be possible that any one else had a right to come in with her?

The question was answered by the appearance of a marvellous lady who followed the porter. "Which of us is here?" she asked. "Oh, it's you, Mrs. Collis! That's your bag, I think."

She spoke like an Englishwoman, yet there was a faint roll of the "r" suggestive of foreign birth or education. Mary had never seen any one like her before. She was unusually tall, as tall as a man of

good height, and her figure was magnificent. Evidently she was not ashamed of her stature, for her large black hat had upstanding white wings, and her heels were high. Her navy blue cloth dress braided with black that had threads of gold here and there was made to show her form to the best advantage. Mary had not known that hair could be as black as the heavy waves which melted into the black velvet of the hat. The level brows over the long eyes were equally black, and so were the thick short lashes. Between these inky lines the eyes themselves were as coldly gray and empty as a northern sea, yet they were attractive, if only by an almost sinister contrast. The skin was extraordinarily white, and it did not occur to Mary that Nature alone had not whitened it, or reddened the large scarlet mouth. Women did not paint at the convent, nor did Lady MacMillan's guests. Mary did not know anything about paint. She thought the newcomer very handsome, yet somehow formidable.

In a moment other people trooped into the corridor and grouped round the door of Mary's compartment. There was a wisp of a woman with neat features and sallow complexion, who looked the essence of respectability combined with a small, tidy intelligence. She was in brown from head to foot, and her hair was brown, too, where it was not turning gray. Evidently she was Mrs. Collis, for she took a lively interest in the bag, and said she must have it down, as the stupid people had put it wrong side up. She spoke like an American, though

not with the delicately sweet drawl that Peter had. Behind her stood a pretty girl whose features were neatly cut out on somewhat the same design, and whose eyes and hair were of the same neutral brown. She had a waist of painful slenderness, and she reminded Mary of a charming wren. Behind her came another girl, older and of a different type, with hair yellow as a gold ring, round eyes of opaque, turquoise blue, without expression, and complexion of incredible pink and white. Her lips, too, were extremely pink, and her brows and lashes almost as black as those of the tall woman. She wore pale purple serge, with a hat to match, and had a big bunch of violets pinned on a fur stole which was bobbing and pulsing with numberless tiny, grinning heads of dead animals. On her enormous muff were more of these animals, and tucked under one arm appeared a miniature dog with a ferocious face. In the wake of these ladies who surged round the door and sent forth waves of perfume, presently arrived a man who joined them as if reluctantly, and because he could think of nothing else to do.

He was much taller than the woman who had come first, and must have been well over six feet. His clean-shaven, aquiline face was of a dead pallor. There were dark shadows and a disagreeable fulness under his gray, wistful eyes, which seemed to appeal for help without any hope of receiving it. He walked wearily and slouchingly, stooping a little, as if he were too tired or bored to take the trouble of throwing back his shoulders.

The ladies talked together, very fast, all but the tall one, who, though she talked also, did not chatter as the others did, but spoke slowly, in a low tone which must be listened to, or it could not be heard. The four laughed a good deal, and when the tall woman smiled she lost something of her fascination, for she had large, slightly prominent eye-teeth which went far to spoil her handsome red mouth. The others paid great attention to her, and to the big man with the sad eyes. In loud voices, as if they wished people to hear, they constantly addressed these two as Lord and Lady Dauntrey.

"I — are you quite sure that you're to be here?" Mary ventured, when Mrs. Collis had whisked into the compartment, and was ringing for some one to take down her bag, after the train had started. "I thought — I had this place to myself."

"Why, if you have, there must be a mistake," replied the American. "Have you taken both berths?"

"No," said Mary. "Only one. Are there two?"

"My, yes, of course. In some there are four. But this is one of the little ones. I expect" — and she smiled — "that you haven't made many long journeys?"

"I haven't travelled at all before," Mary answered, blushing under the eyes turned upon her.

"Well, you'll find it's all right, what I say," the American lady went on. "But" — and she lost interest in Mary — "aren't we silly? Miss Wardrobe had better come in here, where there's only one

place, and my daughter and I'll take a compartment together, as the car seems pretty full."

"Please don't call me Miss Wardrobe!" exclaimed the golden-haired girl. "That's the eighth time. I've counted." As she spoke, her tiny dog yapped in a thin voice at the offender, its round eyes goggling.

"I hope you'll excuse me, I'm sure," returned the American, acidly.

"I must say, I really don't think mamma's had occasion to mention your name as many times as eight since we first had the pleasure of meeting," the charming wren flew to her mother's rescue. "But you've got such a difficult name."

"Anyhow, it isn't like everybody else's, which is *something*," retorted the girl who had been called "Miss Wardrobe."

Mary began to be curious to know what the real name was. But perhaps she would find out later, as the young woman was to share her little room. It would be interesting to learn things about this odd party, yet she would rather have been alone.

Soon after Paris there was dinner in the dining-car not far away, and Mary had opposite her the girl with the queer name. No one else was at the table. At first they did not speak, and Mary remembered the training of her childhood, never to seem observant of strangers; but she could not help looking sometimes at her neighbour. The first thing the latter did on sitting down was to draw off her gloves, and roll them inside out. She then opened

a chain bag of platinum and gold, which looked rather dirty, and taking out, one after another, eight jewelled rings, slipped them on affectionately. Several fingers were adorned with two or three, each ring appearing to have its recognized place. When all were on, their wearer laid a hand on either side of her plate, and regarded first one, then the other, contentedly, with a slight movement causing the pink manicured nails to glitter, and bringing out deep flashes from diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. Glancing up suddenly, with self-conscious composure, the young woman saw that her neighbour's eyes appreciated the exhibition. She smiled, and Mary smiled too.

"If I didn't think my stable-companion was all right, I wouldn't have dared put them on," remarked "Miss Wardrobe." "But I do feel so — well, undressed almost, without my rings; don't you?"

"I haven't any," Mary confessed.

"Why — don't you like rings?"

"Yes, on other people. I love jewels. But for myself, I've never thought of having any — yet."

"I've thought more about it than about anything else," remarked the girl, smiling a broad, flat smile that showed beautiful white teeth. She looked curiously unintelligent when she smiled.

"Perhaps I shall begin thinking more about it now."

"That sounds interesting. What will start your mind to working on the subject? Looking at my

rings?" She had an odd, persistent accent which irritated Mary's ears. If it was like anything the convent-bred girl had heard, it resembled the accent of a housemaid who "did" her bedroom in Cromwell Road. This maid had said that she was a London girl. And somehow Mary imagined that, if she had rings, she would like taking them out of a gold bag and putting them on at the dinner-table. Because Mary had never had for a companion any girl or woman not a lady, she did not know how to account for peculiarities which would not have puzzled one more experienced.

"Perhaps," she answered, smiling.

"Maybe you mean to win a lot of money at Monte, and buy some?"

"At Monte — does that mean Monte Carlo? Oh, no, I'm going to Florence. But some money has been left to me lately, so I can do and have things I shouldn't have thought of before." Mary explained all this frankly, yet without any real wish to talk of her own affairs.

The four others of the party were at a table opposite; and as there was a moment's lull in the rush of waiters and clatter of plates for a change of courses, now and then a few words of conversation at one table reached another. As Mary mentioned the legacy Lady Dauntrey suddenly flashed a glance at her, and though the long pale eyes were turned away immediately, she had the air of listening to catch the rest of the sentence. By this time the little quarrel over "Miss Wardrobe's" name had appar-

ently been forgotten. The five were on good terms, and talked to each other across the gangway. Again the title of the two leading members of the party was called out conspicuously, and people at other tables turned their heads or stretched their necks to look at this party who advertised the "jolly time" they were having. They chattered about "Monte," and about celebrities supposed to have arrived there already, though it was still early in the season. Lady Dauntrey told anecdotes of the "Rooms," as if to show that she was not ignorant of the place; but Lord Dauntrey said nothing unless he were addressed, and then answered in as few words as possible. Nevertheless he had something of that old-world courtesy which Mary had been taught, and she felt an odd, instinctive sympathy with him. She even found herself pitying the man, though she did not know why. A man might be taciturn and tired-looking yet not unhappy.

They sat a long time at dinner before they were allowed to pay and go. Lord Dauntrey's party smoked, and the girl at Mary's table offered her a cigarette from a gold case with the name "Dodo" written across it in diamonds. Mary thanked her, and refused. She had heard girls at school say that they knew women who smoked, but she had never seen a woman smoking. It seemed odd that no one looked surprised.

Her neighbour, whom she now heard addressed as Miss Wardropp, did not come into their compartment at once, but stopped in another of the

same size, where she, with Lord and Lady Dauntrey and Miss Collis, played a game with a little wheel which they turned. When Mary stood in the corridor, while the beds were being made, she saw them turning this wheel, and wondered what the game could be. They had a folding board with yellow numbers on a dark green ground, and they were playng with ivory chips of different colours.

Mary had the lower berth, but when she realized how much pleasanter it would be to sleep in the upper one, she could not bring herself to take it. She felt that it would be selfish to be found there when Miss Wardropp came to undress; and when the latter did appear, toward midnight, it was to see the lower berth left free.

"Why, but you were below. Didn't you know that?" she inquired rather sharply, as if she expected her room mate to insist on changing.

"Yes," Mary replied meekly. "But I — I left it for you, and your little dog."

"Well, I do think that's about the most unselfish thing I ever heard of any one doing!" exclaimed Miss Wardropp. "Thank you very much, I'm sure. No good my refusing now, as you're already in?"

"No, indeed," Mary laughed.

"I wish you were going with us to the Villa Bella Vista," said the other. "From what I can see, we don't seem likely to get much unselfishness there, from anybody."

Then, as she undressed, showing exquisite underclothing, she followed her ambiguous remark by

pouring out information concerning herself, her companions, and their plans.

She was from Australia, and intimated that her father, lately dead, had left plenty of money. She had met Lord and Lady Dauntrey a month ago in Brighton at the Metropole. Where the Dauntreys had "picked up the Collises," Dodo Wardropp did not know, but they were "late acquisitions." "Lord and Lady Dauntrey have taken a furnished villa at Monte for the season," she went on, "a big one, so they can have lots of guests. I and the Collises are the first instalment, but they're expecting others: two or three men with titles."

She said this as if "titles" were a disease, like measles. As she rubbed off the day's powder and paint with cold cream, there was a nice smell in the little room of the *wagon lit*, like the scent of a theatrical dressing-room.

"I suppose you're looking forward to a delightful winter," Mary ventured, from her berth, as Dodo hid a low-necked lace nightgown under a pink silk kimono embroidered with gold.

"I hope!" exclaimed Miss Wardropp. "I pay for it, anyhow. I don't mind telling, as you aren't going to Monte, and won't know any of them, that we're sort of glorified paying-guests. The Collises haven't said to me they're that, and I haven't said what I am; but we know. I'm paying fourteen guineas a week for my visit, and I've a sneaking idea her ladyship's saving up the best room for other friends who'll give more. I could live at the

Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo, I expect, for that price, but you see the catch is that Lord and Lady Dauntrey can introduce their guests to swell people. I wouldn't meet the right kind if I lived in a hotel, even with a first-rate chaperon. I know, for I came to Monte Carlo with an Australian friend, for a few days on my way to England. It's no use being at a resort if you don't get into the smart set, is it?"

"I suppose not," said Mary. "But I think I care more about places than people."

"I don't understand that feeling. I want to get in with the best. And though Lord Dauntrey's poor, and I imagine disappointed in expectations of money with her, he must be acquainted with a lot of important titled people. He's a viscount, you know, and that's pretty high up."

"I didn't know," Mary confessed. "I don't know anything about society."

"You seem to have led a retired sort of life," Miss Wardropp remarked, though without much curiosity, for she was not really interested in any woman except herself, or those connected with her affairs. "Surely you read about their wedding in South Africa last Spring?"

"No. I have never read newspapers."

"I don't bother either, except society news and fashion pages. But there were pictures of them both everywhere. I expect she got the photographs in, for he doesn't seem a man to like that sort of thing. Lord Dauntrey was out in South Africa

for years, trying to make his fortune, but it didn't appear to come off. Friends of mine I knew at Brighton, who took me there, a rich Jew and his wife who'd lived in Africa, said when the Dauntreys turned up at the Metropole that he'd been at a pretty low ebb out there. I believe he studied for a doctor, but I don't know if he ever practised. Nobody can say exactly who Lady Dauntrey was originally, but she was a widow when he married her, and supposed to have money. He doesn't seem to care for society, but she's ambitious to be some one. She's so good-looking she's sure to succeed. I expect to know everybody smart at Monte. That's what I've been promised, and Lady Dauntrey 'll entertain a good deal. If that doesn't amuse her husband he can shoot pigeons, and gamble at the Casino. He's got a system at roulette that works splendidly on his little wheel. We were playing it this evening. But I expect I'm boring you. You look sleepy. I'll turn in, and go bye-bye with Diablette."

For the rest of the night all was silence in the compartment, save for the gobbling noises made in her sleep by the griffon Diablette. Mary lay awake in her upper berth, longing to look out, and thrilling to musical cries of big baritone voices at the few stops the train made: "Di-jon-n, cinq minutes d'arrêt! Ma-con-n, cinq minutes d'ar-rêt! Ly-on, dix minutes d'a-rr-êt!"

It was wonderful to hear the names ring like bells out of the mystery and darkness of night,

names she had known all her life since she had been old enough to study history or read romance. She thought that the criers must have been chosen for their resonant voices, and in her mind she pictured faces to match, dark and ruddy, with great southern eyes; for now the train was booming toward Provence: and though Mary began to be drowsy, she held herself awake on purpose to hear "Avignon" shouted through the night.

Very early, almost before it was light, she arose noiselessly, bathed as well as she could, and dressed, so as to be able to look out at Marseilles. Miss Wardropp was asleep, and as the train slowed into the big station in the pale glimmer of the winter morning, Mary walked to the end of the car. The stop would be twenty minutes, and as the train gave its last jerk Mary jumped on to the platform.

The sky was of a faint, milky blue, like the blue that moves under the white cloud in a moonstone, and the first far down ray of morning sun, coming up with the balmy wind from still, secret places where the youth of the world slept, shimmered golden as a buttercup held under the pearly chin of a child. This was only Marseilles, but already the smell of the south was in the air, the scent of warm salt sea, of eucalyptus logs burning, and pine trees and invisible orange groves. On the platform, osier baskets packed full of flowers sent out wafts of perfume; and as Mary stood gazing over the heads of the crowd at the lightening sky, she thought the

dawn rushed up the east like a torchbearer, bringing good news. Just for a moment she forgot everybody, and could have sung for joy of life — a feeling new to her, though something deep down in herself had whispered that it was there and she might know it if she would. It was such faint whisperings as this which, repeated often, had driven her from the convent.

"How young I am!" she thought, for once actively self-conscious. "How young I am, and how young the world is!"

She let her eyes fall from the sky and plunge into the turmoil of the station, turmoil of people getting in and out of trains, of porters running with luggage, of restaurant employés wheeling stands of food through the crowd, piled oranges and mandarines, and white grapes, decorated with leaves and a few flowers; soldiers arriving or saying goodbye, jolly dark youths in red and blue; an Arab trying to sell scarfs from Algiers; a Turkish family travelling; English men and women newly landed, with P. & O. labels large on their hand-bags; French *bonnes* wearing quaint stiff caps and large floating ribbons; Indian ayahs wrapped in shawls. Mary gazed at the scene as if it were a panorama, and scarcely dwelt upon individuals until her eyes were drawn by the eyes of a man.

It was when she had mounted the steps of her own car, and turned once more before going in. So she looked down at the man looking up.

She blushed under the eyes, for there was some-

thing like adoration in them, romantic admiration such as a man may feel for the picture of a lovely saint against a golden background, or the poetic heroine of a classic legend. They were extraordinarily handsome eyes, dark and mysterious as only Italian eyes can be, though Mary Grant did not know this, having gazed into few men's eyes, and none that were Italian.

"Looking up so, his face is like what Romeo's must have been," she said to herself with an answering romantic impulse. "Surely he is Italian!"

And he, looking up at her, said, "What a picture of Giulietta on the balcony! Is she French, Italian, Russian?"

The man was a Roman, whose American mother had not robbed him of an ardent temperament that leaned toward romance; and he had just come back to the west across the sea, from a romantic mission in the east. He had not exchanged words with a woman for months, in the desert where he had been living. For this reason, perhaps, he was the readier to find romance in any lovely pair of eyes; but it seemed to him that there never had been such eyes as these. For always, in a man's life, there must be one pair of eyes which are transcendent stars, even if they are seen but once, then lost forever.

This was not his train, for the *luxe* does not take local passengers, in the season when every place is filled between Paris and Nice; but because of Mary's face, he wished to travel with her, and look

into her eyes again, in order to make sure if they really held the magic of that first glance.

He found a train-attendant and spoke with him rapidly, in a low voice, making at the same time a suggestive chinking of gold and silver with one hand in his pocket.

IV

Under the golden sunshine, the *luxe* steamed on: after Toulon no longer tearing through the country with few pauses, but stopping at many stations. For the first time Mary saw olive trees, spouting silver like great fountains, and palms stretching out dark green hands of Fatma against blue sky and bluer sea. For the first time she saw the Mediterranean that she had dreamed of in her cold, dim room at the convent. This was like the dreams and the stories told by Peter, only better; for nothing could give a true idea of the glimmering olive groves. Under the silvery branches delicate as smoke-wreaths, and among the gnarled gray trunks, it seemed that at any moment a band of nymphs or dryads might pass, streaming away in fear from the noises of civilization.

At St. Raphael and Fréjus colossal legs of masonry strode across the green meadows, and Mary knew that they had been built by Romans. Pine trees like big, open umbrellas were black against a curtain of azure. Acres of terraces were planted with rows of flowers like straightened rainbows: young roses, carnations, pinky white stock and blue and purple hyacinths; and over the coral or gamboge painted walls of little railway stations bougainvillea

poured cataracts of crimson. By and by the train ran close to the sea, and miniature waves blue as melted turquoise curled on amber sands, shafts of gilded light glinting through the crest of each roller where the crystal arch was shattered into foam.

Then came the wonderful red rocks which Peter had described; ruddy monsters of incredible shapes which had crawled down to drink, and lay basking in the clear water, their huge rounded backs bright as copper where the westerly sun smote them; for by this time it was afternoon. At Cannes, yachts sat high in the quaint harbour like proud white swans: mysterious islands slept on the calm surface of the sea, dreaming of their own reflections; and a company of blue-clad mountains, strangely crowned, were veiled below their foreheads like harem women with delicate fabric of cloud, thin as fine muslin.

After Cannes, appeared Antibes, with its peninsula of palms and pines, its old harbour, town, and white lighthouse; and at last, Nice.

Many people whose faces Mary had seen at dinner the night before, and again at luncheon, left the train at Nice; and on the platforms, waiting for local trains, she saw girls in flowery hats, and white or pale tinted serge dresses, such as they might wear on a cool day of an English summer. They could not be travelling far, in such frocks and hats, and Mary wondered where they were going, with their little plump hand-bags of netted gold or embroidered velvet.

By and by a train moved in, also on its way to

Monte Carlo. Women and men suddenly surged together in a compact wave, and struggled with each other at the doors of the corridor carriages. Fat men had no hesitation in pushing themselves in front of thin women; robust females dashed little men aside, and mounted triumphantly. All were eager, and bent upon some object in which they refused to be thwarted.

The beauty of the coast was dreamlike to Mary, who had lived ever since she could remember in the north of Scotland, among moorland and hills whose only intrinsic brilliance of colour came at the time of heather. She had loved the browns and cloudy grays, and the deep blue of the lake and the pensive violet shadows; but this was like a burst of gorgeous day after an existence in sweet, pale twilight. She rejoiced that she had persisted in seeing the Riviera before passing into Italy.

It seemed that, after Nice, each stopping-place was prettier and more flowery than the one before. She had no one to admire them with her, for since luncheon, which Mary had taken early, Miss Wardropp had been in another compartment playing the game with the little wheel and spinning ivory ball. But after passing Villefranche harbour, Beaulieu drowned in olives, and Eze under its old hill-village on a horn of rock, the Australian girl came back, to exchange a cap of purple suède for her cartwheel of a hat.

"The next station where the train stops will be Monaco," she announced.

"Oh, then you'll be getting out almost at once?" And Mary prepared to say goodbye.

"Not yet. The station after Monaco: Monte Carlo — darling place! But the principality begins at Monaco of course. I told you how I stayed three days before I went to England. Almost everybody who lands at Marseilles wants to run on to Monte for a flutter, in season or out."

Miss Wardropp put away a novel, and dusted a little powder over her face, with the aid of a gold vanity-box. The train plunged through a tunnel or two, and flashed out, giving a glimpse of Monaco's high red rock with the Prince's palace half girdled by ruinous gray walls and towers of ancient feudal days. Dodo was ready to go. She bade her companion goodbye, and good luck in Florence. "Too bad you're not getting out here!" she said, as they shook hands. And then Mary forgot her in gazing at the Rock of Hercules, the red rock crowned with walls as old as history, and jewelled with flowers. Close to shore the water was green and clear as beryl, and iridescent blue as a peacock's breast where the sea flowed past the breakwater. In the harbour were yachts large and small, a trading ship or two, and fishing boats drawn up on a narrow strip of beach. Across from the Rock, and joined to it by the low-lying Condamine, was Monte Carlo, with the white Casino towers pointing high above roofs and feathery banks of trees, like the horns of a great animal crouched basking in the gay sunlight.

Mary remembered how Peter had told her the tale of Hercules landing here: how he had come in a small boat, and claimed the rock and the lovely semi-circle of coast for his own. "The guests of Hercules, going to pay him a visit," she said to herself now, as passengers began to push their way along the corridor, in order to be the first ones down. The girl's heart began suddenly to beat very fast, she did not know why.

"What is there to be excited about?" she asked herself. No answer came. Yet the fact remained. She was intensely excited.

"If I were getting out, like all these other people," she thought, "there'd be an excuse. But as it is ——

Then, far down within herself, a tiny voice said: "Why shouldn't you get out — now, quickly, while there's time?"

It was a voice which seemed quite separate from herself, and she could feel it as if her body were a cage in which a tiny bird sang a small song in a sweet voice that must be listened to intently.

There was no strong reason, when she came to think of it, why she should not listen, although to listen gave her a sensation of childish guilt. She was her own mistress. She had never promised Peter, nor any one else, not to come to Monte Carlo. Peter had advised her against coming, that was all. And Peter, though dear and kind, had no right ——

Why not obey the bird voice, and get out quickly while there was time?

It was beautiful here, and this was the best season. Florence could be very cold, people said, and so could Rome. But on the Riviera, in December, roses and a thousand flowers were in bloom.

To dash out of the train unexpectedly, as a surprise to herself, would be a great adventure. To come another time, according to a plan, would not be an adventure at all.

Never in her whole past life had she had an adventure. What fun to land at Monte Carlo with only hand-luggage! The rest would go on to Florence, but somehow she could retrieve it sooner or later, and meanwhile how amusing to spend a little part of her legacy in fitting herself out with new things, clothes which would give her a place in the picture! And she needn't stay long. What were a few days more or less?

There was only a minute to make up her mind. The train was slowing into the station, a large attractive station, adorned with posters of dream-places painted in rich dream-colours, like those of stained glass. On the platform, to the left of the station building, stood a boy twelve or fourteen years old, dressed in livery. He had a bullet head, with hair so black as to seem more like a thick, shining coat of varnish than hair. His eyes were very large and expressed a burning energy, as if he were nerving himself to a great feat, and the moment of action had arrived. Mary watched him, in a sudden flash of curious interest, as if she must at all costs see what he was going to do, and then make

her decision. This was a ridiculous idea, but she could not take her eyes off the child, as the train slowly approached him on its way into the station. He drew in a great breath, which empurpled the brown of his face, and then emitted a single word, "As-cen-s-e-u-r!" in a singing roar, into which he threw his whole soul, as a young tiger does. As the train passed the boy, Mary, gazing out of the corridor window, looked straight down the deep round tunnel that was his open mouth, and caught his strained eye. He suddenly looked self-conscious, and broke into a foolish yet pleasant smile. Mary smiled too, like a child, showing her dimples. Then she knew that she would get out at Monte Carlo no matter what happened.

At this instant, as the train stopped with a slight jerk, the attendant in his neat brown uniform whisked past Mary into her compartment, to snatch Miss Wardropp's bag and earn his fee. By this time the passengers who were alighting at Monte Carlo had pressed down the corridor in a procession, treading on each others' heels.

"If I should get out here, could I use my ticket afterward on to Florence?" Mary hastily inquired in French. But whatever the answer might be, her mind was obstinately set on the adventure she wanted.

"But yes, certainly, Mademoiselle," replied the man.

"Then will you take my bag, too, please?"

The porter's tired eyes dwelt on her for an instant

understandingly, sympathetically, even pityingly. Perhaps he had seen other passengers make up their minds at the last minute to stop at Monte Carlo. He said nothing, but seized the bag; and with her heart beating as if this decision had changed the whole face of the world, Mary hurried after the stout brown figure, and joined the end of the procession as it poured from the *wagon lit* on to the platform.

V

Mary followed the other people who had left the train. Lord and Lady Dauntrey, with their party, were far ahead, and she could not have spoken to them if she had wished, without running to catch them up; but she did not wish to speak. She had taken no dislike to them; on the contrary, she was interested, but she did not feel inclined to ask advice, or attach herself to any one. She enjoyed the idea of a wonderful new independence.

The sunshine made her feel energetic, and full of courage and enterprise, which had been crushed out of her in London by the chilly manner of her relatives, and the weight of the black fog.

Passing through the station, after having part of her ticket torn from its book, she reached the front of the building, where a great many hotel omnibuses and a few private motors were in waiting. A station porter was following her now, with the one dressing-bag which remained of her abandoned luggage. "Quel hôtel, Mademoiselle?" he inquired.

Mary hesitated, her eyes roaming over the omnibuses. One was conspicuous, drawn by four splendid horses, driven by a big man with a shining conical hat, and a wide expanse of scarlet waistcoat.

No other omnibus looked quite so important. On it, in gold letters, Mary red "Hôtel de Paris." The name sounded vaguely familiar. Where had she lately heard this hotel mentioned! Oh, yes! by Miss Wardropp.

"Hôtel de Paris, s'il vous plaît," she answered.

In another moment her bag was in the omnibus, and she was climbing in after it in the wake of other persons, enough to fill the roomy vehicle. As she settled into her corner she saw a man walk slowly by at a distance. He was not looking at her for the moment, and she had no more than a glimpse of a dark, clearly drawn profile; yet she received a curious impression that he had just turned away from looking at her; and she was almost sure it was the man she had noticed at Marseilles. Now her Romeo idea of him struck her as sentimental. She wondered why she had connected such a thought with a man in modern clothes, in a noisy railway station. The morning and its impressions seemed long ago. She felt older and more experienced, almost like a woman of the world, as the big horses trotted up a hill, leaving all the other omnibuses behind. From under the large hat of a large German lady, she peered eagerly, to lose no detail in approaching Monte Carlo.

High at the right rose a terrace like a hanging garden, attached to a huge white hotel. In front of the building, and also very high, ran a long covered gallery where there appeared to be restaurants and shops. At the left were gardens; and then in a

moment more, coming out into an open square, all Monte Carlo seemed made of gardens with extraordinary, ornate white buildings in their midst, sugar-cake buildings made for pleasure and amusement, all glass windows and plaster figures and irrelevant towers, the whole ringed in by a semi-circle of high, gray mountains. It was a fantastic fairyland, this place of palms and bosky lawns, with grass far too green to seem real, and beds of incredibly brilliant flowers.

One section of the garden ran straight and long, like a gayly patterned carpet, toward a middle background of climbing houses with red roofs; and it began to spread almost from the steps of the cream white building with jewelled and gilded horns, which Mary had seen in Peter's Riviera snapshots: the Casino. As the omnibus swung round a generous half circle, slowly now to avoid loitering groups of people, Mary saw many men and women arriving in motors or on foot, to go up the shallow flight of carpeted marble steps which led into the horned building. She thought again of an immense animal face under these erect, glittering horns; a face with quantities of intelligent, bright glass eyes that watched, and a wide-open, smiling mouth into which the figures walked confidently. It looked a kind, friendly animal basking in the gardens, and the big clock above its forehead, round which pigeons wheeled, added to its air of comfortable good nature. Mary was suddenly smitten with a keen curiosity to see exactly what all these people would see who

allowed themselves to be swallowed by the mouth which smiled in receiving them. Most of the women were smartly dressed and had gold or embroidered bags in their hands, like those she had seen at Nice station. They went in looking straight ahead, and men ran up the steps quickly. Surely this was more than a mere building. There was something alive and vital and mysteriously attractive about it, though it was not beautiful at all architecturally, only rich looking and extraordinary, with its bronze youths sitting on the cornice and plaster figures starting out of the walls, laughing and beckoning. It had a personality which subtly contrived to dominate and make everything else in the little fairyland of flowers subservient to it, almost as if the emotions and passions of thousands and tens of thousands of souls from all over the world had saturated the materials of its construction.

As this fancy came to Mary's mind, the sun in its last look over the gray Tête de Chien struck her full in the eyes as with a flung golden gauntlet, then dropped behind the mountain, setting the sky on fire. An unreal light illumined the buildings in the fairy gardens, and Mary became conscious of an invisible tide of burning life all around her which caught her in its rushing flood. She was impelled to float on a swift and shining stream which she knew was carrying many others besides herself in the same direction toward an unseen but definite end. She was like a leaf snatched from a quiet corner by the wind and forced to join the whirl of its fellow-dancers.

It was a feeling that warmed her veins with excitement, and made her reckless.

The omnibus passed the Casino, and a little farther on stopped in front of the Hôtel de Paris. It too was fantastically ornate, surely the most extraordinary hotel on earth, with a high roof of a gray severity which ironically frowned down upon gilded balconies and nude plaster women who supported them, robustly voluptuous creatures who faded into foliage below the waist, like plump nymphs escaping the rude pursuit of gods. Their bareness and boldness startled the convent-bred girl, even horrified her. She was the last to leave the omnibus, and then, instead of pushing in with her fellow-passengers to secure a room before others could snap up everything, she lingered a moment on the steps.

Still that magical light illumined the *Place*, under the sky's rosy fire. The long glass façade of the restaurant sent out diamond flashes. The pigeons strutting in the open space in front of the Casino were jewels moving on sticks of coral. As they walked, tiny purple shadows followed them, as if their little red legs were tangled in pansies. Across the *Place*, on the other side of the garden and opposite the hotel, was an absurd yet gay collection of bubbly Moorish domes, and open or glassed-in galleries, evidently a café. Music was playing there, and in front of the balconies were many chairs and little tables where people drank tea and fed the strutting pigeons. Beyond the bubbly domes shimmered a panorama of beauty which by force of its

magnificence redeemed the frivolous fairyland from vulgarity, rather than rebuked it. Under the rain of rose and gold, as if seen through opaline gauze, shone sea and hills and distant mountains. On a green height a ruined castle and its vassal rock-village seemed to have fallen from the top and been arrested by some miracle halfway down. Beneath, a peninsula of pines silvered with olives floated on a sea of burnished gold; and above soared mountains that went billowing away to the east and to Italy, deep purple-red in the wine of sunset.

Mary forgot that people do not come to hotels for the sole purpose of standing on the steps to admire a view. It was a liveried servant who politely reminded her of her duty by holding the glass door open and murmuring a suggestion that Mademoiselle should give herself the pain of entering. Then, slightly dazed by new impressions and the magnitude of her independence, Mary walked humbly into an immense hall, marble paved and marble columned. She had never seen anything half so gorgeous, and though she did not know yet whether she liked or disliked the bewildering decorations of mermaids and sea animals and flowers, she was struck by their magnificent audacity into a sense of her own insignificance. Before she could dare to walk here as by right, or seat herself in one of those great gilded and brocaded chairs, she must buy clothes which suited Monte Carlo as all this florid splendour of ornamentation suited it. She did not put this in words, but like all women

possessed of "temperament," had in her something of the chameleon, and instinctively wished to match her tints with her environment.

Suddenly she recalled a solemn warning from Mrs. Home-Davis that some hotels refused to receive women travelling alone, and her heart was inclined to fail as she asked for a room. But fortunately this was not one of those cruel hotels Aunt Sara had heard about. Mary was received civilly and without surprise. A view of the sea? Certainly Mademoiselle could have a room with a view of the sea. It would be at the price of from thirty to fifty francs a day. Mary said that she would like to see a room for thirty francs, and felt economical and virtuous as she did so. She had been brought up to consider economy a good thing in the abstract, but she knew practically nothing of the value of money, as she had never bought anything for herself until she went to London. It seemed to her now that, with fifty thousand pounds, she was so rich that she could have anything she wanted in the world, but she had nebulous ideas as to what to want.

A pretty little pink and gray room was shown her, so pretty that it seemed cheap until she heard that food and everything else was "extra"; but the view decided her to take it. The large window looked southwest, with the harbour and rock of Monaco to the right, and to the left an exquisite group of palms on the Casino terrace, which gave an almost mysterious value to a background of violet sky melting into deeper violet sea. As she stood

looking out, silver voices of bells chimed melodiously across the water, from the great Byzantine cathedral on the Rock. It was all beautiful and poetic. Mary would have taken the room if it had been a hundred instead of a paltry thirty francs a day. But she could not afford to stop and look at the violet sea, still haunted by the red wreckage of sunset. She had her shopping to do, for she must somehow find exactly the right hat and dress, ready to put on, or she would have to dine in her room, and that would be imprisonment on the first night at Monte Carlo.

She ran quickly downstairs again, not in the least tired after her journey, and changed a thousand-franc note, which perhaps inspired official confidence in the young English lady with only a hand-bag for luggage. Also, she inquired where she could buy the prettiest things to wear, and was directed to the Galerie Charles Trois, which turned out to be that covered gallery with shops and restaurants that she had noticed when driving up the hill.

By this time, though it was not yet dark, lights gleamed everywhere like great diamonds scintillating among the palms, or stars shining on the hills. The grass and trees and flowers in the *Place* of the Casino looked twice as unreal as before, all theatrically vivid in colour, and extraordinarily flat, as if cut out of painted cardboard against a background of gauze.

The ruined castle and old rock-town tumbling down the far-off hillside still smouldered in after-

sunset fire, windows glittering like the rubies in some lost crown, dropped by a forgotten king in battle. But the red of the sky was paling to hyacinth a strange and lovely tint that was neither rose nor blue. As Mary went to buy herself pretty things, walking through a scene of beauty beyond her convent dreams, she murmured a small prayer of thanksgiving that she had been guided to this heavenly place.

She must write to Reverend Mother and Peter, she thought, explaining why she was here, and how glad she was that she had happened to come. Then it struck her suddenly, though more humorously than disagreeably, that it would be rather difficult to explain, expecially in a way to satisfy Peter. Perhaps dear Reverend Mother would be anxious for her safety, if Peter said any of those rather sifly things of Monte Carlo which at the last she had said to her — Mary. After all, maybe it would be better to keep to the first plan and not write until she could date a letter Florence. Then she put the little worry out of her mind and gave her soul to the shop-windows in the Galerie Charles Trois.

It was a fascinating gallery, where lovely ladies walked, wonderfully dressed, pointing out dazzling jewellery in plate glass windows, to slightly bored men who were with them. Nearly everybody who passed sent out wafts of peculiarly luscious perfume. Mary walked the length of the gallery, so as to see all the shops there were to see, before de-

ciding upon anything. She passed brilliantly lighted restaurants where people were having tea, some of them at little tables out of doors, protected by glass screens; and as she walked, people stared at her a good deal, especially the men who were with the lovely ladies; and the bored look went out of their eyes. Mary noticed that she was stared at, and was uncomfortable, because she imagined that her gray tweed and travelling hat drew unfavourable attention.

But she intended to change all this. She would soon be as well dressed as anybody, and no one would stare any more. In one window there were displayed, not only gowns, but hats and cloaks, and exquisite furs, all shown on wax models with fashionably dressed hair and coquettish faces. One pink and white creature with a startlingly perfect figure wore a filmy robe of that intense indigo just taken on by the sea. Underneath a shadowlike tunic of dark blue chiffon there was a glint of pale gold, a sort of gold and silver sheath which encased the form of the waxen lady.

"My hair is that colour," Mary thought, and imagined herself in the dress. The next thing was to walk in and ask a very agreeable Frenchwoman if the gown were likely to fit her without alteration. "I must have something at once," Mary explained. "My luggage has gone to Italy.'

The agreeable Frenchwoman was sympathetic. But yes, the dress would fit to perfection, not a doubt of it, for Mademoiselle had the ideal figure

for model robes. And if, unfortunately, the trunks had all gone, Mademoiselle would want not only one dress but several? And hats? Yes, naturally. Other things also, of the same importance. The house made a speciality of trousseaux. Had Mademoiselle but the time to look? She need not buy anything, or fear giving trouble. Then Madame added a few compliments against which Mary, unaccustomed to such food, was not proof.

She bought the blue chiffon over pale gold, which was hastily tried on behind a gilded screen; and the wax lady was robbed of gold embroidered stockings and golden shoes to match. There was a hat of dark blue with a crown of silver-threaded golden gauze, which was indispensable with the dress. To wear over this a long cloak of white satin with a wide collar of swansdown, was the *dernier cri* of Paris, Madame assured her customer. There were other dresses and hats too, for morning and afternoon, and even more extravagant *dessous* than those Jennings had tabooed in London.

After the first, Mary forgot to ask prices. She was lost in a delirium of buying, and ordered whatever she liked, until her brain was tired.

She then thanked Madame charmingly for her politeness and asked to have the things sent home at once.

But yes, they should go on the moment. And would Mademoiselle pay now, or at her hotel?

Mary laughed at herself, because she had forgotten about paying. It might as well be now, as

she wished to go farther and get some gloves. Deftly Madame made out the account. It came to three thousand eight hundred and ninety francs.

When Mary had mentally turned francs into pounds she was a little startled; but luckily, against her aunt's advice, she had come away with a good deal of ready money, English, French, and Italian. It took nearly all she had to settle the bill, but, as Madame remarked gayly, Mademoiselle had left herself enough for an evening game at the Casino. This was, of course, true, as more could somehow be obtained to-morrow. For the moment Mary had forgotten her curiosity about the pleasant, basking animal in the garden, but she decided that, after dinner — which she must have soon, as she was already beginning to be hungry — she would walk into the monster's smiling mouth.

VI

Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, known to his friends in Rome as Vanno, went down early to dinner at the Paris. This, not because he was hungry, but having come to the hotel because he knew that his Juliet of Marseilles was there, he had no intention of missing a chance to look at her. If she did not appear early, he would go on dining until it was late, no matter how late.

Such a resolution, and just such an adventure as this into which he had flung himself with characteristic impulsiveness and passion, were strange for Prince Vanno, because since a first unhappy love, when he was a mere boy, he had avoided women. Adventure and romance were in his blood, the Italian blood of his father, the Irish-American blood of his beautiful mother. But his adventures had not been love adventures, since that first agony had driven him for comfort to the silence of the desert. Since then he had gone back to the desert for desire of great empty spaces, and the fire of eastern stars, needing comfort no longer for a lost love. That had passed out of his heart years ago, leaving no scar of which he was conscious.

He had just come back from the desert now, and an Arab astrologer who was a friend of his had told

him that December of this year would be for him a month of good luck and great happenings, the star of his birth being in the ascendant. Almost it began to look as if there might be something in the prophecy; and Prince Vanno, laughing at himself (with the dry sense of humour that came from the Irish-American side of his parentage), was half inclined to be superstitious. Astronomy was his love at present, not astrology, and last year he had discovered a small blue planet which had been named after him and whose sapphire beauty had been much admired. Still, because he had always had a passion for the stars, and went to the east to see them at their brightest, he was tolerant of those who believed in their influence upon earth-dwellers; therefore he was ready to yield with confident ardour to sudden impulses in this the month of his star. Mary Grant's eyes had looked to him like stars, and he had followed them. Already he had had one stroke of luck in the adventure, for he had been bound to Monte Carlo from Marseilles, before he saw her, not to try his fortune at the tables, but to meet his elder brother and sister-in-law who were to finish their honeymoon close by, at Cap Martin, and to stay for an aviation week at Nice, when an invention of his would be tried for the first time. But if Mary had gone on beyond Monte Carlo, he too would have gone on. Having plunged into the adventure, for a pair of eyes, he was prepared to pursue it to the end wherever the end might be, even if he missed the flying week and broke an engage-

ment with the bride and bridegroom. But it was luck that she should be getting out at the place where he had meant to stop for his own reasons.

He supposed, of course, that she was travelling with relatives or friends. Although he had seen her mounting the steps of a *wagon lit* apparently alone, this did not argue that some one who belonged to her was not inside. And when, from the window of the train whence he leaned at every station, he saw her again at Monte Carlo, she was surrounded by a crowd. One of the ladies shoulder to shoulder with her might be a mother or aunt, one of the men a father or uncle; and it had been the same when he followed, just in time to see her get into the Hôtel de Paris omnibus. Already the vehicle was full. She was the last in. His idea was that, being the youngest of her party, she had waited for them to be placed before taking a seat herself.

He knew of her now, having examined the visitors' book at the Paris, that she was "Miss M. Grant"; that the name was written in a very pretty, rather old-fashioned hand; that after it came "London" in the same writing. He was sure the name must be hers, because it was last on the page before he wrote his own; and she had gone in last, after everybody else, leaving the people she was with to do their name-signing before her. Also, the other women on the page were all "Madame" or "Frau" or "Mrs." He was rather surprised, somehow, to learn that she was English. In spite of her unusually fair hair he had fancied that she would turn out to

be French, her type was so *spirituelle*, yet so suggestive of "temperament."

If he had not been following a pair of eyes, Prince Vanno would have gone to a quiet hotel in the Condamine, to be near the aviation ground, for, being utterly unsnobbish, like all Italians of great families, he rather disliked "smart" crowds, rich food, and gorgeous decorations. But the only way not to lose the stars he followed was to keep near them. He would not for a great deal have questioned the hotel people about "Miss M. Grant," otherwise he might have learned for how long a time her room was engaged, and, incidentally, that she was alone. But as it was, he had to find out things for himself, and to do this must be in the same hotel.

It was only seven o'clock when he came down from his little room at the top of the house, not nearly as expensive as Mary's, and stopped at the foot of the marble stairs, which he liked better than the lift, to look round the big hall. There was no great crowd, for most people who had come in from the Casino were dressing for dinner, and Prince Vanno saw at a glance that Miss M. Grant was not there. He went on slowly through the Louis Seize tea-room, to the gorgeous restaurant with its domed and gilded ceiling, its immense wall paintings, and glass front.

At one of these window tables — a very small one — sat a lovely creature, alone. A good many heads were turning to look at her, so probably she had not long ago arrived. For an instant Vanno's

eyes were fixed upon the glittering figure, and the bowed face shadowed by an eccentric hat, without recognizing it. But it was only for an instant. Then, with a shock of surprise which was almost horror, he realized that this lovely, low-necked bird of Paradise creature was the same gentle girl he had followed.

"Dio!" he said to himself, and bit his lip. He felt the blood rush up to his face, as if some one had given him an insulting blow, which he could not avenge because his hands were tied.

There were two or three other young and beautiful women alone, dressed with equal extravagance, their gowns as low, their hats as big; only she, his Juliet, was more beautiful than any. That was the difference between them. But was it the only difference? The young man, whose eyes still reflected the golden light of vast desert spaces, asked himself the question with a sick sinking of the heart. He had followed an angel, and found her — what? Because about those two or three others there was no question at all. And why was she here alone, dressed like them, if — but he would not finish the sentence in his mind. He resolved to study the girl, and give her the full benefit of the doubt, so long as there was a ray of hope.

Vanno had not gone so far as to fall in love at first sight; yet coming back from the desert with his heart open to beauty and romance, he had been willing to let himself go to the brink, or over it, if it were worth while, else he would not have followed

Juliet's eyes. But he wished to have nothing to do with the white angel if she were a fallen angel. Such a one would be easy to know, to walk with and talk with, whereas he might have found it difficult to make the acquaintance of a conventionally brought up girl. Some men might have been glad to find the heroine of a romantic adventure dining alone at a fashionable hotel at Monte Carlo, in a sheath-like, low-cut dress and a hat of to-morrow's fashion. But Prince Vanno Della Robbia was sick at heart, and dazed as by a blow

His father, Duca di Rienzi, had a strain of stern asceticism in his nature, and even the impulsive, warm-hearted American mother could not wholly redeem from gloom the cold palace in Rome and the dark fourteenth century castle at Monte Della Robbia. Each of these natures had given something to Vanno, and the differences were so strongly marked that his elder brother had said, "to know Vanno was like knowing two men of entirely opposite characters, each struggling for mastery over the other." But even in his asceticism he was ardent. Whatever he did, he did with passion and fervour, which he could laugh at as if from a distance sometimes, but could not change. And his ideas of the right life for women were not unlike the ideas of eastern men. Women should be guarded, kept apart from all that was evil or even unpleasant. So the lovely American mother had been guarded, somewhat against her will, by the Duke, and she had died while she was still young. She had never talked to Vanno of

women's life and girls' life in her own country, for she had gone to the unseen land while he was still a boy. If she had stayed, perhaps he would not have had to go to the desert for comfort, when he at twenty loved a woman of twenty-eight, who flirted with him until he was half mad, and then married an American millionaire.

The table nearest Mary was not engaged, for it was too early in the evening for a crowd in the Paris restaurant. Vanno signified to a waiter his desire for this table, and was taken to it. He sat down facing Mary, and pretended to study the menu. He hardly knew what he ordered. A waiter was bringing the girl a small bottle of champagne, in an ice-pail. The man cut the wires, and extracted the cork neatly, but with a slight popping sound. Mary started a little, and glancing up at the waiter smiled at him gayly, with a dimple in each cheek. Her big hat was placed jauntily on one side, and the deep blue velvet brim, with the gauzy gold of the soft crown, was extremely striking on the silver-gold waves of her hair. In her wonderful dress, which showed a good deal of white neck, she looked so fashionably sophisticated that Vanno feared the start she gave at the popping of the cork might be affected. He gazed across at her with mingled disapproval and admiration which gave singular intensity to his deep-set, romantic eyes as Mary met them.

She was in a mood to be delighted with everything that happened, and it seemed a charming

happening that the handsome young man from Marseilles should have chanced to come to this hotel. It did not occur to her that his coming might not be an accident, and she was pleased to see him again.

Her bringing up, in all that concerned her treatment of men, had been neglected; rather, it had not been given at all. As a schoolgirl she had never met any men except a few mild youths when visiting Lady MacMillan, and then she had never seen them alone. She had thought herself a child, and had behaved as a child, in those days. Then had come her years as a postulant and as a novice. Men had ceased to exist as influences in her life. It had not been necessary to teach her what to do when in their society, for it had seemed improbable that she ever would be. When, at the last moment, she had decided that after all she "had not the vocation," there had been little or no time to prepare her for the world. And she had come out of the convent with no social wisdom except the wisdom of kindness and courtesy to all fellow-beings.

Man was decidedly a fellow-being, and Mary, to whom he was interesting because entirely new, was inclined to be very kind to him, especially when he had the handsome, almost tragic dark face of a Romeo or a young Dante, and eyes like wells of ink into which diamonds had fallen.

She was feeling childishly pleased with herself in her new dress, for she loved beautiful things, and knew next to nothing of suitability, provided the colours were right. By day, one had blouses and

skirts, and high-necked frocks. At night, if one were in the world, one wore low gowns. She had learned this from Peter and other girls at school, and also from Lady MacMillan. When there were entertainments at the convent for the pupils, as there were several times each year, the girls put on their prettiest clothes. They had low-necked gowns for the dances, at which their partners were, of course, invariably girls, and they said that, when they "came out," they would have their dresses cut lower and made more fashionably. Of this, the sisters quite approved for their girls, whom they trusted never to do, never to wear, anything immodest. At Lady MacMillan's, Mary had worn simple evening dress, before she resolved to become a nun; and in London even Aunt Sara and Elinor, with their thin necks, had considered it necessary to display more than their collarbones each night at dinner.

Mary, having little money in her schoolgirl days, had never owned anything very pretty, and now she thought it right and pleasant to make up for lost time. The "Madame" of the shop in the Galerie Charles Trois had earnestly recommended this gown and this hat for dinner and the Casino; therefore Mary was sure that her costume must be as suitable as it was beautiful, and that she was quite "in the picture," in this magnificent room. She admired the lovely, perfumed ladies with wonderful complexions and clothes, at neighbouring tables, and was thankful that she looked not too unlike

them. She hoped that she might become acquainted with at least one or two of the prettiest before long, because it must be pleasant to make friends in hotels with other people who were alone like one's self. Peter also had admired the lovely ladies with wonderful complexions and clothes who chose to live in the best hotels at Monte Carlo; but she admired them in a different way, with a kind of fearful fascination. And she had never talked of them to Mary. One did not talk to Sister Rose of such things.

Mary was glad that the Dante young man (she began to call him thus, for his profile really was like the poet's, and after all too stern for Romeo) could see her in this dress and hat, after having a sight of her first in the tweed, which she had now grown to detest. It really did seem as if he remembered, for he looked at her with a straight look, almost as if he were asking a grave, important question. She was afraid that he must be unhappy, for certainly his eyes were tragic, if they were not reproachful; and of course they couldn't be reproachful, as he didn't know her, and had nothing to be reproachful about.

The waiter who served her was a charming person, with delightful manners, almost like those of the Frenchman who had been kind to her on the way to Paris. He recommended things on the menu, which turned out to be exquisite. They were the most expensive, also, but Mary did not know that. It seemed quite odd that one should have to pay for food at all, for always it had appeared to come

as a matter of course, like the air one breathed. When he advised her sympathetically to try a little champagne, refreshed with ice, she would have been grieved to hurt his feelings by refusing, even if she had not rather wanted to know what champagne was like. People in books drank it when they wished to be merry and enjoy themselves, and it made their eyes bright and their cheeks red. Mary had had the chance of reading very few novels, but she recalled this bit of useful knowledge concerning champagne.

She tasted it, and found it nice, deliciously cold and sparkling. No wonder it made the eyes bright! But after all, she could not drink much, though it seemed a shame to waste anything so good. "You can have the rest," she said to the waiter, when she had finished her first glass. He was surprised, for most ladies, he noticed, could finish two or three glasses, or even more.

Again the man with the profile of a young Dante was looking at her with the grave, anxious look that puzzled her. She met his eyes for the third or fourth time, and was so sorry for his apparent unhappiness where every one else seemed merry, that she half smiled, very sweetly and gently, as one would smile at a gloomy child.

The man did not return her kindness. An angry flash lit his eyes, and he looked extremely haughty and unapproachable, no longer a lonely figure needing sympathy, but a high personage. Mary lowered her lashes, abashed; and when she did this Vanno,

who was on the point of hating her because she was not the white angel he had thought, doubted again, and was more bewildered than ever. Her friendly smile had been sweet, and he, who was here only because of her, had quenched its light! He regretted passionately his own ungraciousness, no matter what the girl might be. And she looked so young, her eyes so full of sea and heaven! On what errand had she come alone to this place? He determined that he would know, and soon.

VII

Mary ordered coffee in the hall, because something of her delight in the gay restaurant had been crushed out by Vanno's snub. She was no longer at peace under his eyes, and wished to avoid meeting them again, so it was pleasanter to go away. But even in the hall she could not forget him, as she had forgotten him after Marseilles. When he too came out from the restaurant, not long after, she saw him, though he was at a distance, saw him without even turning her eyes; and she thought how tall he was, and how much a man, although slender to the point of leanness. He sat on a sofa in the hall, and ordered coffee. Mary knew, though she did not look at him again, and interested herself instead in other people.

All those who came from dinner, except the Prince, drank their coffee and went out. Some went by the front door, taking the direction of the Casino. Others disappeared into an unknown part of the hotel; and so many chose this way, that Mary inquired of a passing waiter where they were all going. "To the Casino, Mademoiselle, by the underground passage, to avoid the night air," the servant answered.

To the Casino. Everybody was going to the

Casino. It was time that Mary should go to the Casino, too. She had brought down her new white cloak with the swansdown collar, and asked a liveried man to put it aside for her while she dined. Now she claimed it again, and having no fear of the "night air," walked out into the azure flood which had overflowed the fantastic fairyland like deep, blue water. The gardens lay drowned in this translucent, magic sea, and the coolness of the sunset hour had been mysteriously followed by a balmy warmth, like the temperature of a summer night in England.

There were as many people in the *Place* as there had been in the afternoon, and all those who were not sitting on garden seats looking at the Casino were walking toward the Casino, or just coming out of the Casino. The eyes of the big, horned animal were blazing with light, and glared in the blue dusk with the hard, bright stare of the gold eyes in a peacock's tail. Windows of the Riviera Palace on the hill above were like orange-coloured lanterns hung against an indigo curtain; and in the *Place* itself bunches of vivid yellow lights, in globes like illuminated fruit set on tall lamp posts, lit the foreground of the strange picture with unnatural brilliance. Grass and trees were a vivid, arsenical green, almost vicious yet beautiful, and the flowers gleamed like resting butterflies. The summer warmth of the air had a curiously tonic and exciting quality. It seemed to have gathered into its breath the sea's salt, the luscious sweetness of heavy white

datura bells dangling among dark leaves in the gardens, an aromatic tang of pepper trees and eucalyptus, and a vague, haunting perfume of women's hair and laces. These mingling odours, suggested to the senses rather than apprehended by them, mounted to Mary's brain, and set her heart-strings quivering with unknown emotions sweet as pleasure and keen as pain.

As she went slowly down the hotel steps to walk across the *Place* her eyes held a new expression. When she had first told herself that she could not stay at the convent, they had asked, looking toward the world, "What is life?" Now they said, "I have begun to live, and I will go on, on, no matter where, because I must know what life means."

Her cheeks were burning still from the first champagne she had ever tasted, and the sweet air cooled them pleasantly. Seeing a number of people on benches opposite the Casino, she decided to sit down for a few minutes before going in. None of these benches was empty, but one was unoccupied save for a young man and a girl, who sat at one end. Mary rather timidly took the other corner, but the couple, after giving her a long stare, returned to their conversation as if she were no more than a shadow.

"This is the last, last straw!" the man grumbled, in English. "I thought there was one missing."

"They never forget to add it to the rest," said the girl.

"Not they," he echoed. "And I wasn't doing

so badly at one time. I've a mind to apply for the *viatique*."

"I shouldn't have the courage."

"Oh, I should. I'd like to get something out of them. I hate the Riviera, anyhow. There's too much scenery all over the place. No rest for the eye."

"But supposing you change your mind, and want come back and try your luck? You couldn't, if you'd taken the *viatique*."

"Yes I could — when I'd paid it back. It's supposed to be a loan, you know, which you have to repay before you're allowed to play again."

"Oh, I didn't know!"

A group of young men walked past, laughing. "Never saw such a run of luck," said one. "Seventeen on red and I was on it from the first. Glorious place, Monte! Let's drink its health!"

They turned, stared with interest at Mary, and passed on, lowering their voices. She caught the words "something new," but there was no sense in them for her ears. She saw the Dauntreys hurrying to the Casino, with Mrs. Collis and her daughter, and Dodo Wardropp. Two men were with them, both young, and one rather distinguished looking. All were too deeply absorbed in themselves and each other to notice her. The ladies were charmingly dressed, and so were most of the women who passed, all going quickly like the figures of a cinematograph; but some were of the strangest possible types. Mary said to herself that they

must be infinitely more interesting in their own secret selves than lookers on could ever know. The hidden realities in all these passionately egotistic selves came to her as she sat watching, in attractive or repellent flashes of light. Then she lost the secret again, and they became mere puppets in a moving show. The only real thing was the Casino, and she began to study the large bright face of it.

Although Mary had never travelled till now, she knew something of architecture from beautiful pictures of ancient Greece and Rome, and Egypt, and of the world's noblest cathedrals, which decorated the schoolroom walls at St. Ursula's-of-the-Lake. This building, it seemed to her, was of no recognized type of architecture. It was neither classic nor Gothic: not Renaissance, Egyptian, nor Moorish. It gave the impression of being a mere fantastic creation of a gay and irresponsible brain. If a confectioner accustomed to work in coloured sugars were to dream of a superlative masterpiece, his exalted fancy might take some such shape as this.

The irregular, cream-coloured façade was broken up into many separate parts by pillars and frenzied ornaments of plaster, and there had been addition after addition, stretching away long and low to the left. A row of large windows, discreetly veiled so that no shadows could be cast from within, glowed with warm yellow light. Their refusal to betray any hint of what passed on the other side suggested

a hidden crowd busy with some exciting, secret pleasure. Along the cornice of the newer portions at the left of the original Casino were perched bronze youths with golden wings, their hands holding aloft bunches of golden flowers. Two towers meretriciously mosaiced with coloured tiles balanced the centre of the higher and middle building, and a portico of iron and glass, ornate yet banal as the architecture of a railway station, protected the carpeted steps and the three large doors which were grouped closely together, doors through which people constantly passed in and out like bees at the entrance to a hive. In the pensive sweetness of the semi-tropical night, this fantastic erection in plaster and gilding and coloured ornaments seemed an outrage, a taunt, a purposeful affront; and yet — the very violence of the contrast, its outrageousness, gave it a kind of obsessing charm.

Unseen from where Mary sat, the Mediterranean sighed upon its ancient rocks. A faint breath of the mysteriously perfumed air stirred the exotic palms over her head and made their fronds rub against each other gratingly, as if some secret signal were being carried on from one to another. Turning to right, to left, or to look behind her, dimly seen mountains soared toward a sky that deepened from asphodel to the dark indigo of a star-powdered zenith. Eastward in the distance ran a linked chain of lights along the high road that led to Italy; and a bright cluster like a knot of fireflies, pulsing on the breast of a mountain, marked the old hill-

village of Roquebrune. Kindly enveloping nature was so sane and wholesome in her vast wisdom and stillness that the sugar-cake Casino and all its attendant artificialities struck into the brooding peace a shrill note of challenging incongruity. The little sparkling patch of light and colour that was Monte Carlo proclaimed that it was there for some extraordinary and powerful purpose,that its bizarre beauty was dedicated to exceptional uses; and it occurred to Mary that the temple of Chance must after all diverge from every rule of architecture in order to stamp its meaning on the mind. The feverish decorations began to express to her the fever of gambling, and even to create a desire for it. She felt this longing grow more insistent, like strains of exciting music that swelled louder and louder; and suddenly in the midst she seemed to hear Peter's voice saying, "What if it should be true, the thing your father was afraid of?"

What if it were true? How could she tell? In his last terrible letter he had reminded her that she had wild blood in her veins, and told her to "be careful."

She had thought when hearing Peter's descriptions of the Riviera that the gambling part of life there would interest her least of all, but already she was under the spell of the Casino. It drew her toward it, as if Fate sat hiding behind the veiled bright windows, just as Monte Carlo had called irresistibly, forcing her to get out of the train when she had meant to go on. She began to doubt her

own nature, her own courage and strength of will. She thought of what was passing on the other side of the cream-white walls as if it were a battle into which she was compelled to plunge, and she imagined that thus a young soldier might feel in a first engagement — tremulous, and almost sick with anxiety which was not quite fear.

Her heart beating fast, she jumped up, and crossing the road resolutely mounted the steps which were guarded by tall, fine men in blue livery. Inside the doors which she had watched so long she found herself entering an outer lobby. Beyond was another, also kept by liveried men. A room led off this, and Mary could see people leaving their wraps with attendants who stood behind counters. She parted with her cloak, and was given a metal disc bearing a number. Near by, a French couple, who looked like bride and groom, were examining their discs, and telling each other that it would be tempting Providence not to stake money on such numbers as *onze* and *dix-sept*. At this, Mary glanced again at her bit of metal. Its number was 124. She remembered hearing from Peter that in the game of roulette it was a favourite "tip" to bet on the number representing your age. Peter spurned the idea as silly and childish; but Mary thought it might do to begin with, as she knew nothing better. Her age being twenty-four, she decided to adopt the French bride's suggestion, and bet on the last two numbers cut into her cloak-ticket.

Beyond the second lobby, she passed into a vast

pillared hall, where men and women, not all in evening dress, were strolling up and down, smoking and chatting, or sitting on leather-covered benches, to stare aimlessly at the promenaders, as if they were tired, or waiting for something to happen.

This hall puzzled Mary, for she had imagined that beyond the two lobbies she would pass directly into the gambling-rooms. Here were no tables such as Peter had described; and the fact that she must go still farther seemed to increase the mystery or secrecy of the place. Mary hesitated, not knowing which way to turn, for there were several doors under the high galleries that ran the whole length of the hall. This must be the atrium, where, Peter had said, the "guests of Hercules" were accustomed to make rendezvous. It was cool and classic, a hall for reflection rather than excitement, as if it were intended for those who wished to plan a new way of playing, or to rest in, between games.

Suddenly a man in livery with a peaked cap threw open a door at the back and past the middle of the hall. From it instantly began to pour a stream of people in evening dress, and as they separated themselves from the tide, they divided into knots of twos and fours.

"Perhaps they gamble in groups, or batches," Mary thought, and her heart sank lest she, being alone, might not be allowed to play. She could not recall anything said by Peter about this; but she went timidly to the door, and asked the man in livery if this were the way "into the Casino."

"It is the way into the theatre," he informed her. "The first act of the opera is just over. Mademoiselle is a stranger then? Those people will go to the roulette and trente et quarante rooms to amuse themselves for half an hour till the beginning of the next act."

"It is the roulette I want, not the opera," Mary heard herself say, as if some one else were speaking.

"Ah, Mademoiselle has her ticket of admission?"

She showed him her *vestiaire* ticket, and the servant of the Casino was too polite to smile, as he explained that something else was necessary before she would be allowed to enter the gambling-rooms. He pointed toward three swing-doors at the far end of the hall, to the left. Through two of these, people were going into a room beyond. Through the middle one they were coming out into the atrium; and as the big doors swung rapidly back and forth there were glimpses on the other side of a vast space full of rich yellow light.

"Those messieurs stationed there would stop Mademoiselle, seeing she was a stranger, and demand her ticket. It is better that she return to the bureau, a room opposite the *vestiaire* where she has left her cloak."

This was an anticlimax, after summoning courage for the plunge into battle; but Mary returned whence she had come, to take her place behind others who waited for tickets of admission. She listened intently to what passed, so that she might know what to do; but it was disconcerting when

her turn came, to be asked for a visiting-card. The lately emancipated Sister Rose possessed no such thing, and expected to be sent away defeated. Yet a path out of the difficulty was quickly found by the alert, frock-coated, black-necktied official behind the long desk. This charming young woman, beautifully and expensively dressed, was not one who deserved to be discouraged from entering the Casino. All she need do was to give her full name and nationality, also her place of residence. Gladly she obeyed; and holding in her hand a *carte du jour* on which she had written her own name, at last she had the right of entrance.

There was still one more mistake to make, however, and she promptly made it, attempting to pass through the right-hand swing-door. But no! It was for season-ticket holders. She must go to the left. The middle door was for those coming out. A fat man, hurrying brusquely in before her, let the swing-door slam in her face. "Le joueur n'a ni politesse, ni sexe," was a proverb of the "Rooms" which Mary Grant had never heard, but would come to understand.

She was on the threshold of an enormous room, magnificently proportioned, hung with lustrous chandeliers, and divided by an archway into two sections. The farther part was much larger than that which she had entered, and more sumptuous in decoration; but the whole was flooded with a peculiar radiance which turned everything to gold. It was far mellower than the light of the atrium, or

the splendid rooms of the hotel. It had actual colour like honey, or the pinky-golden skin of apricots. It was bright, yet the impression it made on the mind was of softness rather than brilliance; and the shining atmosphere of the room, instead of being clear, seemed charged with infinitesimal particles of floating gold, like motes in rays of sunshine. The tables, under darkly shaded, low-hanging lamps, gave the effect of sending a yellow smoke, like incense, up to the height of the great dazzling chandeliers. It was almost as if the hands of players in fingering gold pieces day after day, year after year for generations, had rubbed off minute flakes which hung like a golden haze in the air.

It appeared to Mary's eyes, taking in the whole and not dwelling upon details, that everything in the farther part of the vast domed room was of gold: different shades of gold; dark, old gold, the richer for being tarnished: bright, glittering, guinea gold: greenish gold, and gold of copper red.

No other colour could have been as appropriate here.

The air was not offensively dead, but it was langorously asleep. Many different perfumes haunted and weighed it down; but there was some underlying, distinctive odour which excited the nerves mysteriously, and sent the blood racing through the veins.

"It is the smell of money," Mary said to herself.

Just inside the entrance doors, on either side, was a large table round which people sat or stood.

Those standing behind the chairs of the seated ones were at least two rows deep, crowded tightly together. Beyond were many other tables, thronged even more densely; and ringed thus with closely packed figures, they were like islands on a shining golden sea, an archipelago of little islands, all of exactly the same size, and placed at equal distances.

Mary, hardly knowing what to expect from Peter's rather vague and disjointed descriptions, had dimly fancied clamour and confusion bursting upon eyes and ears on the instant of entering the gambling-rooms. But the silence of the place was as haunting and mystery-suggesting as the indefinable odour, and more thrilling to the imagination than the loudest noise.

She who had been Sister Rose was horrified to find herself thinking of a cathedral lighted for a midnight mass. Almost, she expected organ music to peal out.

Slowly she moved down the room, past the first tables, and, as she walked, the muffled, characteristic sounds she began to hear seemed but to punctuate and emphasize the silence, like echoes in a cave: a faint rattle of rakes, like the rustle of leaves, and a delicate chink-chink of gold, like the chirping of young birds just awakened by dawn.

A voice at each table as she drew near or passed made some announcement. She caught the words distinctly yet not loudly pronounced: "Faites vos jeux, messieurs. . . . Rien n'va plus. Onze, noir, impair et manque."

"*Onze*" was one of the numbers the French couple had decided to play. Mary wondered if it had come at their bidding, and she wished intensely to see what was going on at the tables inside those close circles of women's hats and men's shoulders. But to see, meant to push. She was not bold enough to do that, and kept moving on observantly, hoping always to discover some island less populous than others.

Now she began to pick individuals out of the crowd. The number of types seemed countless. It was as if each country on earth had been called upon to contribute as many as it could spare of unusual and striking, even astonishing, specimens of humanity, on purpose to provide eccentric or ornamental features of this strange, world's variety show.

There were some lovely, and a few singularly beautiful, women from northern and southern lands. Peter had said that one could "tell Americans by their chins," which were firmer and more expressive of energy than other chins, and Englishwomen by their straight noses, which looked as if they had been handed down as precious heirlooms from aristocratic ancestresses. The mellow light gilded many such chins and such noses, and shone into soft dark eyes such as only the Latin races have. Mary fancied she could tell French from Italian women, Spanish from Austrain, Hungarian from Russian or German types. Almost invariably the pretty women and the good-looking men were well dressed.

Only the plain and ugly ones seemed not to care for appearances. But there were more plain people than handsome ones; and dowdy forms strove jealously to hide the charming figures, as dark clouds swallow up shining stars. All faces, however, no matter how beautiful or how repulsive, how old or how young, had a strange family likeness in their expression, it seemed to Mary; a tense eagerness, such as before her novitiate she had seen on the faces of Lady MacMillan's guests sometimes when they had settled down seriously to play bridge.

She had expected to see unhappy and wildly excited faces, because, Peter said, people often lost or won fortunes in these rooms in a single night; but no one in this moving crowd looked either very miserable or very radiant. They did not even appear to be greatly excited, yet most of them seemed absorbed, as if they listened for a sound which would mean something of vital importance; or else they had an air of fearing that they had missed the all-essential signal which might never come again.

It was not the "high season" yet, Mary's waiter at the Paris had said, and the "*vrai monde*" would not come in its greatest rush until after Christmas and the New Year; yet the Casino was filled with a throng of persons many of whom looked immensely rich and important, and none of whom, at worst, was shabby. Even those who were dowdy appeared well-to-do. Mary saw that it was not necessary to gamble in groups. Men and even

women, all alone, pushed their way through the thick wall of hats and shoulders round the table, sometimes being lost altogether, or sometimes emerging again in three or four minutes to scurry across the shining expanse of floor to another table. By and by, when she began to feel calmer, Mary ventured near a table in the middle of the room, within full sight of doors which led to other rooms: a long vista straight ahead, where all the decorations seemed new and fresh, and a light white as silver streamed from hanging lamps like diamond pendants and necklaces for giantesses or goddesses of fortune. So different was the colour of this light from that of the first great *salle*, that a silver wall seemed built against a wall of gold.

Standing outside the circle at the table, new sounds in the silence struck Mary's ear, not emphasizing the heavy silence, as did the delicate chinking of coins and the announcements of roulette numbers, but jarring and ruffling its smooth surface: little sudden rustlings and squabblings, disputes between players in French or German, sharp and mean, yet insignificant as the quarrelling of a nestful of birds in the ample peace of a spreading beech tree.

Now and then there seemed a chance that Mary might find a place in the back row at a table, but some one else, also watching, invariably darted in ahead of her. Each time the hope came, her heart gave a bound, and the blood sang in her ears. She was astonished at her excitement, which seemed

exaggerated beyond reason, and ridiculous, yet she could not conquer it; and the trembling that ran through her body made her knees feel very weak, after she had stood for perhaps half an hour. Looking round, she noticed that there were a good many brown leather-covered seats along the mirrored and gilded walls. Most of these were fully occupied by resting men and women, some very old and tired looking, others eagerly counting money, or jotting down notes in little books or on cards. As she looked, an extraordinary woman much bejewelled, with a face a century old under bright red hair, and a hat for a lovely young girl, jumped abruptly up from the seat nearest Mary, and almost ran to one of the tables, where she flung herself into the crowd, like a diver into a wave. Her place on the bench was left empty, and Mary took it, to follow the example of others and count her money while resting.

Sitting down, she had on one side a young and pretty woman in a charming dress and hat, more suitable for a past June than a present December, even a Riviera December. Her face, too, which she turned with a gaze of interest on Mary and her costume, was slightly, pathetically faded, like the petals of a white rose gathered while in bud and pressed between the pages of a book. She was like a charming wax doll which had lost its colour by being placed too near a warm fire.

On the other side was a very old man, gray as a ghost, who showed no sign of knowing that he had

a new neighbour. Everything about him was gray: his thin, concave face, his expressionless eyes, his sparse hair and straggling moustache, his clothes, and his hands, knotted on the back like the roots of trees. His grayness and the bleak remoteness of his air made him seem unreal as a spirit come back to haunt the scene of long-ago triumphs or defeats. Mary could almost have persuaded herself that he did not exist, and that the pale form and glassy eyes were visible to her alone.

She took her purse from a bag of gold and silver beads she had bought in the Galerie Charles Trois, and counted her money. She had a little more than five hundred francs, and wondered what could be done with that sum at roulette. Even the sound of tinkling gold and silver did not attract the dead gray eyes to Mary; but perhaps it broke some dreary dream, for the old man got up stiffly as if in protest, and walked away with the gait of an automaton.

"Heaven be praised!" murmured in French the weary white rose on Mary's other side; "he brings bad luck. But perhaps he will take it away with him."

Mary realized that her neighbour was speaking to her, and turned with a smile of encouragement, thankful to find some one who looked kind, and would perhaps tell her things.

The pretty woman went on, without waiting to be answered: "He is like a galvanized corpse; and indeed, he may be one, for he ought to have died long ago. Have you ever heard his story?"

"No," Mary said. "I have only just come here."

"For the first time?" The other's face brightened oddly.

"Yes, it is my first time."

"And you are alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Poor little one! But that will not be for long."

"I don't know yet how long I shall stay."

"Oh! I did not mean quite that. But let it pass. Shall I tell you the story of the old man? It will interest you, if you don't know Monte Carlo. Nothing is too strange to happen here. It is only ordinary things which never happen in this place, Mademoiselle."

"I have a friend who said something like that. Please tell me the story."

"I'll make it short, because you will wish to play, is it not? And if you like, I will teach you the game. That old ghost is an Englishman. Some day he will come into money and a title. Meanwhile he is supported by the Casino. Always, morning, noon and night, year in and year out, he is in these rooms; but he is not allowed to play. If he put one five-franc piece on the tables, biff! would go his pension. Twenty-five years it is since he came, they say. I have been here myself but three, and it is a lifetime! It spoils one for other things, somehow. He lost everything at the tables one night, all those years ago; so he crept down to a lonely place on the shore, and cutting his throat, at the same instant threw himself into the sea. But he

could not die. The salt water brought him to life. He was found and nursed by a fisherman. When the Casino people heard what had happened they had pity for the unfortunate one. They are not without hearts, these messieurs! Ever since they have supported him. When he comes into his fortune, perhaps he will pay them — who knows? But in any case, he will disappear and be no more seen. We think he is a spy."

"A spy?" Mary repeated. "What would a spy do here?"

"My poor amateur! There are many. For one thing, they watch for thieves: people who claim the money of others as their own, at the tables. That is quite a way of living. Sometimes it goes very well. But it is a little dangerous. Do you want to play, Mademoiselle? You are sure to have luck on your first night. Even I used to have luck at first."

"Have you none now?" Mary asked, pityingly.

"Oh, I have no longer even the money to try my luck — to see whether it has come back. Yet once I won twenty thousand francs, all from one louis at trente et quarante, and at one séance. That was a night! a memory to live on. And at present it is well I have it to live on, as there is nothing else."

"Oh, how sad, how sad!" exclaimed Mary. "If only you would let me help you a little — in some way."

"You are very good, but of course I could not accept charity," said the pale rose, looking down at

her faded lace and muslin finery. "Still, if I bring you luck at the game, and you win, I shall feel I have earned something, is it not?"

"Yes, indeed," Mary assured her, delighted with the simple solution. "But it seems impossible to get near a table."

"It is not impossible," said the other, a gleam bright as the flash of a needle darting from her jade gray eyes. "Many of those people are only watching. They must give way to serious players. You will see! Shall it be trente et quarante or roulette? Roulette, you can tell by the name, is played with a wheel. Trente et quarante with cards — and for that you must go to another room, for all is roulette here. In the card game a louis is the smallest stake. At roulette it is five francs.

"I have only five hundred francs," Mary announced.

"Then I advise roulette. Besides, it is more amusing. Never can one tire of seeing the wheel go round, and wondering where the dear little white ball will come to rest."

"Yes, I feel I shall like roulette better," Mary decided.

"That is right. You have temperament, Mademoiselle. Already you listen to your feelings. I too, have a strong feeling. It is, that we shall be friends. My name is Madame d'Ambre — Madeleine d'Ambre. And yours?"

"Mary Grant."

"Madame or Mademoiselle?"

"Mademoiselle, of course." Mary blushed.

It seemed almost shocking that any one could even fancy she might be married, she who was just out of the cloister, almost a nun.

"Ah, here one is so often Madame while still quite young. Now, let us follow that tall, *chic* Monsieur who has but one eye and one ear. If we can play what he plays, we are sure to win. Often, when near him, I have prayed that even one five-franc piece might come my way, for since he lost an eye and an ear he never loses money. It was different when he was here a few years ago, before he went out to the east, where he had his mysterious bereavement, no one knows quite what, but it is said that he loved an eastern girl, and was smuggled into a harem. In old days he did nothing but lose, lose."

Mary glanced at the person indicated — a tall man in evening dress, whose features would have been agreeable if it had not been for a black patch over one eye and, on the same side of the head, a black pad over the ear, fastened on by a thin elastic cord. Then she glanced away again, feeling faintly sick. "No, I can't follow him," she said. "Not to win a thousand pounds."

The lady with the pretty name smiled her sad, tired little smile. "You must not turn pale for so small a thing," she laughed. "There are a hundred people in these rooms to-night far stranger than he. I could tell you things! But see, three Germans are going from the table in front of us. When three

Germans move, they leave much room. Keep close to me; that is all you need do."

Mary obeyed in silence. She was grateful to her guide, yet somehow she was unable to like her as well as at first. Fragile as Madame d'Ambre appeared, she must have had a metallic strength of will, if not of muscle, for quietly yet relentlessly she insinuated herself in front of other people grouped round the table. Mary would have retreated, abashed, if she had not feared to hurt her new friend's feelings; but rather than be ungracious, she clung, soon finding herself wedged behind a chair and in front of two German ladies.

VIII

"It is a triumph to seize an advantage from a German!" whispered the Frenchwoman, beginning to look flushed and expectant. "You see that woman in the chair you are touching? She was one of the greatest actresses of the world, Madame Rachel Berenger. Now she is too old and large to act, so she lives in a beautiful villa, across the Italian frontier. She is always coming to Monte Carlo to do this."

"This" was scattering gold pieces all over the table, as if she were sowing peas, then changing her mind about them, and reaching wildly out to place them somewhere else. She was dressed in deep mourning, and had a very white face which might once have been beautiful. Now she was like a dissipated Greek statue draped in black.

"Faites vos jeux, Messieurs," said one of the six extraordinarily respectable and intelligent-looking men who Mary saw at a glance were employés of the Casino. They were in neat black clothes, with black neckties. Peter had told her that the four who spun the roulette wheel and paid the players were called croupiers, and that they were allowed to have no pockets in the clothes they wore when at work, lest they should be tempted to secrete money.

But perhaps this was a fable. And there was so much money! In all her life Mary had not seen as much money as lay on this one expanse of green baize.

The man who called on the gamblers to begin staking put out his hand to a large wheel sunk into the middle of the oblong table. This wheel was the same, in immensely exaggerated form, as the toy with which the Dauntreys had played in the train. It was a big disc of shiny metal, set in a shallow well, rimmed with rosewood. All around its edge went a row of little pockets, each coloured alternately red and black. The expanse of green baize was marked off with yellow lines into squares, numbered with yellow figures. The two lengths of yellow patterns going outward from the wheel were facsimiles of each other, and only sixteen players could sit round the table, but eight or ten times that number crowded in double or treble ranks behind the seated ones. The high chairs of the two inspectors who sat opposite one another were usurped by tired women who leaned against them, or tried to perch on the edges; and as the croupier leaned forward to turn the wheel, arms were stretched out everywhere, scrabbling like spiders' legs, staking money selected from piles of notes or gold and silver.

The statuelike woman in black dashed on twenty or thirty louis, some on numbers, some on a red lozenge, some on the words *Pair* and *Manque*.

"She cannot possibly win," mumbled Madame d'Ambre. "She has lost her head and staked on

so many chances that if one wins she must lose much more on the others. It is absurd. Watch her this time, and next spin I will tell you what to do for yourself."

The croupier had picked a little ivory ball out of one of the pockets before setting the wheel in motion. Then, as it began to revolve, with a deft turn of the wrist he launched the ball in a whizzing rush along a narrow shelf inside the rosewood rim, and in a direction contrary to the whirl of the disc.

For several seconds, which seemed long and tense to Mary, the wheel revolved, the ivory ball dashing wildly around until the croupier proclaimed in his calm, impersonal voice: "Rien ne va plus!" Some people reluctantly ceased their feverish staking of louis, notes, and five-franc pieces, but others dashed on money up to the last instant. The wheel slackened speed; the ball lost momentum, and, rolling down the slope, struck one of a lozenge-shaped row of obstacles. It rebounded, almost sprang out of the wheel, hesitated over a pocket, and leaped into the next, where it lay still.

"Vingt-quatre, noir, pair et passe," announced the calm voice.

"Twenty-four! My age and my ticket number! I meant to stake on it!" Mary cried out aloud in her excitement. "Now it is too late."

Her regret was so keen as to be agonizing. It seemed that a serious misfortune had befallen her. Something in her head was going round with the ball. She felt as if she ought to have won all the

money lying there on the table, as if she had a right to it.

People who had won and were having their winnings paid to them were too busy to notice what went on behind their backs; but some of those who had lost and had nothing to do till the time to stake again, tittered faintly and craned their heads round to look at the girl who was almost crying because she had not staked on twenty-four, her age. But Mary did not realize that she was the object of any one's attention, for the statuelike woman in black was shrilly insisting that she had had the maximum, nine louis, on the number 24. "*En plein*, I tell you, *en plein!*"

"But no, excuse me, Madame, you had money on black and the second dozen, on pair, and on the *carré* of twenty-four; but nothing on the number itself. Your maximum was on twenty-six," the croupier explained firmly.

"I tell you it was on twenty-four!" shrieked the actress.

"Madame is mistaken. You staked in so many different places, it is impossible for you to remember."

"It is still more impossible for you. Do you intend to pay me?"

"But certainly, for everything you won."

"And the maximum on twenty-four?"

"Not that, Madame."

"I will complain to the management!"

"As Madame pleases."

"I will stop the game till I am paid!"

One of the two inspectors left his high chair, came to the enraged lady and attempted to soothe her. She looked magnificent in her passion, ten years having fallen like a mask from the marble face.

The croupier, who had paid her for several bets won, attempted to go on with his duties. People, some delighting in the "row," others annoyed at the delay, placed their stakes, but she, a lioness at bay, stared furiously without putting a piece on the table. As the disc turned, however, she pounced. She threw a louis into the wheel. But the croupier, without changing countenance, took out the coin, pushed it back to her, and began spinning again. In went another louis and again the croupier stopped the wheel. Voices rose in complaint: Russian voices, German voices, English voices. "Is this going on all night?"

"Pay Madame," said one of the inspectors.

Quietly and with incredible quickness nine times thirty-five louis were counted out, payment for a maximum on a number. As the croupier pushed the notes and gold across the table, a beautiful white hand, blazing with rings, thrust it proudly back again. "That is all I wanted," the actress said, with the air of Lady Macbeth. "The acknowledgment that I was right. Keep the money."

The croupier shrugged his shoulders, and spun the wheel, with a bored air.

"Faites vos jeux, Messieurs."

"Shall I put something for you on twenty-four?" hastily asked Madame d'Ambre.

"But it has just come."

"It may come again. Often a number repeats. Shall I or not? An instant, and it will be too late."

With her heart in her throat, Mary handed the Frenchwoman a hundred-franc note crushed in a ball. Madame d'Ambre asked a croupier near where she stood to stake the money. He did so, just in time. The ball slipped into the pocket of number 21. "Too bad! But better luck next time. Will you try a simple chance, red or black, for instance? Or one of the dozens?"

"No, twenty-four again," answered a voice that Mary hardly knew as her own. "I must!" With a trembling hand, she gave her friend nine louis. "That's the maximum for a number, you said," she faltered. "Please put it on."

"But all your money will soon be gone at this rate. A louis would bring you thirty-five ——"

"No, no, the maximum!"

Madame d'Ambre, aided by her croupier-neighbour, obeyed.

A strange golden haze floated before Mary's eyes. She could not see through it. She tried to tell herself, as the big wheel spun, that this was not important at all; that it did not really matter what happened: yet something inside her said, "It's the most important thing in the world, to win, to win, to make all these people envy you. It isn't the money, it's the joy, the triumph, the ecstasy."

The ball dropped. Mary could not look, could not have seen if she had looked: but her whole soul listened for the croupier's announcement.

"Vingt-quatre, noir, pair et passe."

She trembled all over, as if she were going to fall. She could hardly believe that she had heard aright, until Madame d'Ambre exclaimed close to her ear: "You have won! I told you that I would bring you luck!"

The actress, petulant with persistent ill fortune, got up muttering, and pushed back her chair. Mechanically Mary dropped into it. A pile of money, notes and gold, was moved toward her by the croupier's rake. People were staring. She was young and beautiful, and evidently half fainting with excitement. Besides, she had won a large sum. It was always a good thing to win on a number *en plein*. But to win the maximum on a number! That somehow did not often happen except to Russian grand dukes and American millionaires.

Mary, confused, and quivering like a struck violin, took her winnings, but, supposing all the money on her side of the table to be hers also, earned by the nine louis, began gayly to gather in with small, white-gloved hands everything within reach.

A cry of protest went up, half laughing, half indignant. Groups of non-players who had been chatting or strolling round the rooms hurried to the table to see "what was the row," any sensation, big or small, being an event to receive thankfully.

"Mais, Mademoiselle!"

The small, predatory hands were arrested: quickly it was explained that when a player wins he has not won all the money on the table. There are others also in luck. Mary, abashed, but too excited to be deeply shamed, apologized in pretty French. Those she would unwittingly have robbed were disarmed by soft eyes and the appeal of dimples. Even hawklike old women ceased to glare. "It is her first séance," was the forgiving whisper. The neat piles of money which she had reduced to ruin and confusion were sorted out again between croupiers and players, while the game obligingly waited. If the offender had been old and dowdy, every one would have grumbled angrily at the bother and delay, but as it was, men grinned and women were tolerant. After three minutes' halt play was ready to begin again.

"Better come away now, Mademoiselle. It is I who counsel you," advised Madame d'Ambre. "It is not well to trust such luck too far. Or else, play with a few five-franc pieces to amuse yourself. If you win, so much to the good. If you lose, what matter? You have still the *gros lot*."

"I couldn't do that. I must trust my luck. I am going on. I shall play on twenty-four again. I wish there were more ways than one for me to back it, and I would," Mary cried, her cheeks red bonfires of excitement.

Madame d'Ambre shrugged her thin shoulders, seeing her own profits diminished. But, a woman

of the world, she knew when it was useless to protest. And perhaps this wild amateur was indeed inspired. "There are seven ways in which to back your number for one spin," she said, carried away a little by Mary's spirit. "*En plein* — that is, full on the number as before; *à cheval* — the number and its neighbour; your own and two others — *transversale plain*; the *carré* — four in a square; six — the *transversale simple:* the dozen in which your number is; its column; also the colour. Twenty-four is black. If your number loses, you may win on something else."

"Very well. Maximums on all, please."

"Impossible! You may not have money enough. On other chances the maximums are much larger."

Mary, confused and fearful of being too late, did not stop to reflect or argue. "Nine louis on each of the chances, then," she panted.

Madame d'Ambre, reflecting selfishly that even if all stakes lost there would still be a good sum to divide from the last winnings, began placing money in desperate haste, the croupier delaying for an instant his *rien ne va plus,* while one of his fellows helped in putting on the gold. Others, who had finished staking over each other's hats and shoulders, and the whole ring of watchers outside, awaited the decision of Mary's destiny with almost as keen interest as if it were their own.

"Vingt-quatre, noir, pair et passe."

A murmur rose, and went to Mary's head like wine. This seemed a miracle, performed for her.

Unconscious of irreverence, she thought that surely the saints had worked this wonder. She forgot that, because she won, others must lose.

"It is marvellous! But these blessed amateurs! It is always they who have the great luck. Twice running — and after twenty-four had been spun just before twenty-one."

The numbers were all marked in their right colours with roulette pencils on little cards, or in well-kept notebooks by the players. Every one knew what had "come out" at the table for many past coups.

"If you'll back twenty-four again, I'll go on it, too," said, in English, a young man in the chair at Mary's right. He was a brown, well-groomed, clean-shaven youth, whose hair was so light that it looked straw-coloured in contrast with his sunburnt skin. "It's *en chaleur*, as they say of numbers when they keep coming up. It may come a third time running. I've seen it happen. Five repetitions is the record. What do you say?"

"I meant to play twenty-four again, anyway," Mary answered, with the peculiar soft obstinacy which had opened the gates of Saint Ursula-of-the-Lake and brought her to Monte Carlo.

"You are plucky!"

"This time, surely, I've money enough for maximums on everything," Mary said to the Frenchwoman behind her, who was now becoming superstitious concerning the luck of her *petite dinde*.

Without protest, Madame d'Ambre selected from the piles of gold and notes now ranged in front of Mary the stakes indicated, and, with a hand not quite steady, placed those within her reach. The neighbouring croupier, faintly smiling, obligingly did the rest, noting without surprise that many players were sportingly, yet timidly, risking fat five-franc pieces on the amateur's number. It was the sort of thing they generally did, the *imbeciles*, when a player was having a sensational run of luck. But certainly there was something magnetic and fatal about this pretty young woman, who was new to the game and the place, something curiously inspiring. Not only he as well as the gamblers felt it, but the croupier at the wheel. The spinner felt in his bones that whether he wished it or not he was certain to spin a third twenty-four.

A round of applause went up from perhaps fifty pairs of hands when the ball was seen to lie once more in the pocket numbered 24. Mary, realizing that the applause was meant for her, felt like a spirit released from its body. She was a goddess on a pinnacle. This was life: the wine of life. It was not the money she thought of. All the gold and paper which had suddenly become hers was nothing in itself, but what it represented was victory extending over the forces of nature. This mysterious game, whose next turn none could foretell, seemed to be yielding its secret to her. She had the conviction that Something was telling her what to do, what would happen with the spin of the wheel. It

would be madness and a kind of vile ingratitude to stop now, while the Something was there.

Hearing the applause, which meant a coup of uncommon interest, people came hurrying from every direction, some even running, with a peculiar step which kept them from slipping on the polished floor. Many had learned this from long practice in running in with the early gamblers at the morning opening of the Casino, when it is "first come, first served," at the chairs.

Those who had been watching the play at other tables, or those who had been losing, joined the rush.

"What is she going to do now, *cette petite sorcière?*" was the question. Hearing it, Mary was flattered to a higher pitch of excitement and self-confidence. She must, she must do something to justify everybody's expectation. The Casino was hers, and there was no world outside — nothing but this magic place of golden light and golden coins.

"What next?" inquired Madame d'Ambre, late mentor, now courtier.

"I'll do whatever you do," said the brown young man, who was English or American.

She looked at the disc as a seeress looks at a crystal. The spinner had his hand on the cross-piece of metal which turns the wheel.

"What does that O mean, on the little brown square between the red and black numbers?" she asked her neighbour gravely.

"That's what they call 'zero.' You can bet on

it like any number; but when it comes, if you're not on it, all your stakes go—biff!—except on the simple chances, when you are put in 'prison,' or else you can take back half. Lots of people like zero better than anything, because they think the croupiers try to spin it, for the good of the bank. It's called *l'ami de la maison*."

"How nice and friendly," said Mary. "I'll put money on zero. What's the maximum?"

"The same as on the other numbers *en plein:* nine louis."

"Then I'll have that on zero," said Mary.

Many players followed her lead, and every one was calling out "zero" and pushing or throwing coins to the croupiers to be staked on that chance.

"Zero!"

Mary was paid nine times thirty-five louis, six thousand three hundred francs, and the others who, superstitiously following her lead, had risked five-franc pieces and louis on *l'ami de la maison*, shared her luck in different degrees.

"Zero once more, please, Madame," said Mary to her companion.

"But no! impossible! It will be something else."

"Perhaps. Still — I will try."

She was right. Zero came again, followed by louder rounds of applause. By this time the whole Casino knew what was going on. A glorified amateur, an English girl, was winning maximums on numbers again and again, in succession, at the table nearest the wall-portrait of the architect, in the

Salle Schmidt. Non-players or discouraged losers bore down upon the "architect's table," running even from the distant trente-et-quarante room.

The story sounded rather like a fairy tale, but the enormous crowd round the centre of interest, and the comparatively slack business being done at other tables, proved its truth. None of the newcomers, even the tallest, could see, but they could hear, and they could feel the thrill from the inner circle.

"And now, Mademoiselle? What will you do? Remember, your luck can't go on forever," murmured Madame d'Ambre, anxious to divide the spoil, which might yet vanish like fairy gold.

"I — I will take twenty-four again, and everything round it."

Many players who had money left, and could reach to put on their stakes, also chose twenty-four. And twenty-four came up. This was historic! No one but the Grand Duke Michael and the few famous punters of the world had such persistent and consecutive luck.

A chef de table in a high chair stood up and unobtrusively beckoned a footman hovering on the far fringe of the crowd. Three minutes later, with equal unobtrusiveness, more money was brought, lest the supply of the table should run low. Few noticed, or knew that anything unusual had happened, with the exception of the play; but Madame d'Ambre had been hoping for and expecting something of the sort.

"They are afraid you will break the bank," she said, in a stage-whisper not meant to be wasted. Those near her who understood French glanced up quickly. Croupiers smiled and said nothing. A murmur went round the table, and flowed like the rippling circles from a stone dropped in a pond, to the crowd which ringed it in.

"What do you mean?" asked Mary.

"Oh, the bank does not really break! They do not even stop play in these days. But they send for more money lest it be needed. Ah, the colossal compliment!"

The pride in Mary's heart was like a stab of pain, almost unbearable in its intensity. But suddenly, as if the current of her thought had been broken, her inspiration seemed gone. The Something was no longer there, telling her where to stake. She wished to play again, but felt at sea, without a rudder. Her unconscious vanity rebelled against risking loss at this table of which she had been the queen, the idol.

She rose, pale and suddenly tired. "I won't play any more," she said, in a little voice, like a child's.

"Oh, why?" asked the young man with the straw-coloured hair.

"I don't know why," she answered. "Only I don't want to."

"Your money!" exclaimed Madame d'Ambre. "We must have all the gold put into *mille* notes, or you cannot carry it."

For an instant Mary had forgotten the money and the necessity of taking it away, but Madame d'Ambre, who had now firmly identified her own interests with those of her protégée, attended to the practical duties of the partnership. She was somewhat disagreeably conscious that the young man's eyes were fixed upon her as she collected her friend's enormous winnings. As people made way for the Frenchwoman and her starlike companion to pass, this man gathered up his small store of gold and silver, and followed. On the outskirts of the crowd stood the Dauntreys and their party. Mary and Madame d'Ambre passed close to them, but the heroine of the moment was too intensely excited to recognize any one. She walked as if on air, her hands full of notes, some of which she was stuffing into her gold-beaded bag.

"Why, it's the girl in the train who said she was going to Florence," exclaimed Dodo Wardropp. "Can she be the one who's made the sensation?"

"Yes, it's she," said Lady Dauntrey. "See how they're looking at her, and pointing her out. I wonder if it's true she's won thousands of pounds?"

No one answered. Lord Dauntrey had slipped quietly away from the others, and found a place at a table near enough to play over some one's head. This was the first time he had found a chance to test his new system, except on the toy roulette wheel. He began staking five-franc pieces, and writing down notes in a small book. The bored look was burned out of his weary eyes. They

brightened, and a more healthful colour slowly drove away his unnatural paleness.

The others, who had been playing in the new rooms, did not follow or look for him. They stared at every one who seemed worth staring at. The two Americans and Dodo expected Lady Dauntrey to know everybody. It was for this, partly, that they were paying large sums to her, and they felt a depressed need of getting their money's worth. So far the arrangements for their comfort at the Villa Bella Vista were disappointing. Still, two young men of title were there, and that was something, although one of them was only an Austrian count, and the other no better than a baronet. But Lord Dauntrey promised for to-morrow morning Dom Ferdinand de Trevanna, the Pretender to an historic throne.

Dodo, according to Miss Collis, had "grabbed" the English baronet, and left her only the Austrian count, who looked younger than any man could really be, and had a wasp-waist which, when he bowed — as he did irritatingly often — seemed liable to snap in two. It was if anything more slender than her own, and she disliked him for it. Lady Dauntrey had Mrs. Collis on her hands, and looked sombrely discontented. But she waked up at sight of Mary. The long, pale eyes between black fringes followed the blue and silver-gold figure with silent interest. Then the handsome face became subtle and greedy.

As Mary was piloted outside the crowd by Madame d'Ambre, four young women separated

themselves hastily from the group round the table, and bore down upon the pair. They were young, or else clinging desperately to the ragged edges of their youth, and all four were dressed in clothes which had been beautiful. They knew Madame d'Ambre, knew her very well indeed, for they called her "Madeleine" or "Chère Lena." Nevertheless, she did not appear pleased to see them.

"Bon soir, mes amies," she said evasively, and would have passed on, but, laughingly, they stopped her. One, who had a marvellous complexion, large black eyes, and bright golden hair, exclaimed, with a charming Parisian accent, that they could not let their Madeleine leave them like that. They had been waiting to congratulate her friend.

"We pray that thou wilt introduce us, dear one," the spokeswoman suggested. "Surely Mademoiselle wishes to add to her happiness by making others happy?" She turned a swimming gaze upon Mary. "Figure to yourself, Mademoiselle; we are unlucky; four companions in misery. It is our bad luck which has united us. Our jewels are all pawned. Not one of us has eaten anything since the first *déjeûner*. And we have a hunger!"

Mary stared, disconcerted by this tale of misfortune suddenly flung at her head, and scarcely sure if it were not a practical joke. The four young women were so charmingly dressed, their hair was so carefully waved, their complexions so pink and white, that it was impossible to believe in their poverty. Besides, they could evidently afford perfume, so

luscious that it must be expensive. Mary thought that they smelled very good; then, a little too good; then, far, far too good, and at last almost unbearable.

"You are joking," she said, timidly.

"Indeed we are not," replied another of the group, a red-haired girl with brown, almond-shaped eyes. "We so hope that you will be an angel, and invite us all to supper."

"What nonsense, Clotilde!" exclaimed Madame d'Ambre. "We have already an engagement for supper."

"Ah, then surely, Mademoiselle, you will share your luck with us in some way? Otherwise, you can't hope to keep it."

"I should be glad to share it," Mary said, warmly. "What can I do?"

The red-haired lady broke into gestures. "She who has won a fortune asks us who have nothing what she can do for us? How she is amusing, this pretty English one!"

"Would you — might I — that is ——" Mary began to stammer.

"We would — you might!" Clotilde finished for her, laughing.

"I wonder you have not more pride!" Madame d'Ambre reproached the four, her white-rose cheeks flushing with annoyance.

"Pride does not buy us supper, or new hats," the girl with golden hair reminded her.

"Oh, please take these, and do whatever you like with them," Mary said hastily, her voice quivering

with shyness and compassion. She began dealing out her thousand-franc notes, and did not stop until she had given one to each of the four.

It was at this moment that Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, unable to resist his desire to follow Mary to the Casino, came within sight of her. This was the picture he saw: the strikingly dressed girl, bright-eyed, carmine-cheeked, feverishly distributing notes to a crowd of young women more showily dressed than herself.

He turned away instantly, chilled and disgusted.

IX

Others were less fastidious than Vanno.

The calm-faced man with black pads over the left eye and ear joined Madame d'Ambre, with a lazy yet determined air, and a glance of interest at Mary. Seeing the brown youth who had been at her table, the elder man nodded to him. This gave Mary's late neighbour an excuse which he had wanted. He stopped, and held out his hand. "How are you, Captain Hannaford?" he asked.

"Hullo, Carleton!" returned the other. "Here for the Nice flying week?"

"Yes," said Carleton, who, beside Hannaford the Englishman, showed by contrast his American origin. His chin was all that Peter had said an American's chin ought to be, and he had keen, brilliant blue eyes. Hannaford, though taller than he, was stouter as well as older, and therefore appeared less tall. He was of a more stolid type, and it seemed incredible that such an adventure as that sketched by Madame d'Ambre could approach such a man. Yet for once, gossip and truth were one. The thing had happened. Hannaford had lately retired from the army, after being stationed for two years in Egypt. For months he had lingered aimlessly in Monte Carlo. Life seemed over for him.

But time remained, and must be killed, unless he preferred to kill himself. He had met Dick Carleton in Egypt last year, where the youngest American aeronaut was making experiments with a new monoplane in a convenient tract of desert. At that time Captain Hannaford had not worn the little black silk pads. He was grateful to the American for not seeming to look at them now.

"I'm here for the flying, with a hydro-aeroplane I'm rather proud of," Carleton went on, "but I'm not staying at Monte. I'm visiting Jim Schuyler, at his place between here and Cabbé-Roquebrune. Lovely place it is. No wonder he never bothers with the Casino, except for concerts and opera. Have you met him?"

"No. But I know him by name, of course. The names of these American millionaires are all-pervading, like microbes. Why does he pitch his tent on the threshold of Monte, if not for the Casino?"

"He says lots of people live about here who never play: and there are other attractions. He has all the gambling he wants in Wall Street: comes here for beauty and music. He gets plenty of both; doesn't go in for society any more than for roulette, but seems to enjoy himself, the two or three months he does the hermit act in his gorgeous garden. He's at the opera to-night. Motored me over. We'll meet, and go back together to Stellamare. Meanwhile ——"

"Meanwhile, I rather guess, as you'd say, that

you'd like to meet my charming — er — acquaintance, and her friend."

"I *never* say 'guess,' nor does anybody else, except in books or plays, but I should like to meet the ladies."

"Madame d'Ambre is so busy regretting she didn't get smaller change for her *protégee's* unforeseen charities that she's forgotten us. I was watching the fun at your table, toward the last."

At the sound of her name, the Frenchwoman turned. Four thousand francs was gone forever, but there was as little use in wailing over money wasted as in crying for spilt milk, so she smiled her pathetic, turned-down smile at Captain Hannaford, and looked wistfully at Dick Carleton. Then quickly, lest further irrevocable things should happen, she laid her hand on Mary's arm. It was a gloved hand, and the glove had been mended many times. Soon, it must be thrown away; but perhaps that need not matter now. There might be a path leading to new gloves and other things. She introduced Captain Hannaford to Mademoiselle Grant, and he in turn introduced "Mr. Richard Carleton, the well-known airman," to them both. Madeleine could speak a little English, but with difficulty, and preferred French. Still, it would have been unwise to tell secrets in English when she was near.

Seeing that she had no intention of passing on the introduction, Clotilde et Cie. retired gracefully, each of the four a thousand francs richer and a

thousand times happier than she had been five minutes before.

"What about supper?" said Hannaford. "Gambling always makes me hungry. I'm in luck tonight. Won't you three be my guests at Ciro's?"

"You are always in luck nowadays," sighed Madame d'Ambre. A shadow seemed to pass over the stolid face of the man, but she did not see it. "Naturally we accept the kind invitation, is it not so, dear Mademoiselle?"

"I must be at Ciro's anyhow, about midnight," said Carleton, "for Schuyler asked me to meet him there for a Welsh rabbit after the opera. But I'll be delighted to go over and sit with you till he comes." He had the pleasant drawl of a Southerner.

"Oh, you're very, very kind," stammered Mary. "But I" — she hesitated, and glanced appealingly at Madame d'Ambre — "I think it's rather late, and I shall have to go home."

"Home?" echoed Hannaford, questioningly.

"My hotel," she explained.

As Madame d'Ambre drew her friend aside for a murmur of advice, the two men looked at each other, Carleton puzzled, Hannaford with raised eyebrows. "I think they're both charming," the American remarked in a low voice. "That little Madame d'Ambre isn't nearly as pretty as Miss Grant, but she's fetching, and looks a bit down on her luck, as if she'd had trouble."

"Perhaps she has," said Hannaford.

"But, dear Mademoiselle," Madeleine was pleading at a little distance, "why won't you go to supper? Do! It would be so pleasant. I have so little happiness; and this would at least give me an hour of distraction."

"You can go without me," said Mary. "Captain Hannaford is your friend, isn't he?"

"Ah, I see! The sight of the poor afflicted man disgusts you. If you refuse, he will know why. It will be ungracious — cruel."

"Don't say that," Mary implored, much distressed. "I wouldn't hurt his feelings for the world. It's true I *can't* bear to look at him, though he hasn't a bad face. But it isn't only that. I could try to get over it. The other reason is, I never met him or Mr. Carleton before, and — and I don't know anything about society, or what is done; but I have a sort of feeling ——"

"Mais mon Dieu!" murmured Madame d'Ambre. "Quelle petite sotte! No matter. It is a pretty pose, and suits you well. I am the last to find fault with it. Yet listen. These gentlemen are distinguished. Captain Hannaford is an English officer who has been of a courage incredible. He can wear many medals if he chooses. Now he is very sad, despite his luck in the Casino. He needs cheering. And this young Monsieur Carleton, the American, I have read of him in the papers. He is widely known as a man who flies, and these airmen are of a nobility of character! I am your chaperon. What more do you ask? I am the widow of

a naval officer. Do you not owe me something for the good turn I have done you to-night?"

"Yes, indeed, I owe you a great deal," Mary admitted.

It was quite certain that what Madame d'Ambre considered as owing to her would be paid.

Prince Vanno saw the four leaving the Casino together, Mary and Carleton walking behind the other two. He had met both the Englishman and the American in Egypt once or twice, and had not thought of them since. Now he would forget neither. The story about Hannaford and his retirement from the army, Vanno knew. He had heard nothing of Carleton except what was to his credit, but somehow this fact made it no less unpleasant for Vanno that the aeronaut should be talking with Mary. He did not believe they had met before to-night.

The Galerie Charles Trois was brilliantly lighted, and supper was beginning behind immense glass windows at Ciro's and the glittering white and gold restaurant of the Metropole. At Ciro's there had been a dinner in honour of two celebrated airmen, and the decorations remained. There were suspended monoplanes and biplanes made of flowers, and when the great Ciro himself saw Carleton, he came forward, inviting the young man to take a window-table.

Carleton explained that he was only a guest; but this made no difference. Except the King of Sweden's table, and that of the Grand Duke Cyril, Mr. Carleton and his friends must have the best.

"My dear friend," said Hannaford, as they sat down, letting his eyes dwell on Madame d'Ambre's costume, "it's lucky for us that we are with a celebrity, or the fatted calf would not have been prepared for us. No use disguising the truth: you and I are a little the worse for wear. Only with you, the damage is temporary. Put you into a new frock and hat, and you'll revive like a flower in fresh water. Nothing can revive me. You see, I look facts in the face."

"Could one not make facts pleasant to see, if one must look them in the face?" Mary ventured, gently.

"I'm sure you will make them so for Madame," said Hannaford.

"It is only those who are very happy, or very miserable, who can joke forever, as you do," said Madame d'Ambre. "I can understand you now, or I could, at my worst. But for the moment I have new life. I try to forget the future."

As they ate a delicious and well-chosen supper she revived, delicately, and regarded her misfortunes from a distance. "To think, if I had not met you all, and if I had kept my resolve," she said, "by now I should have found out the great secret."

As she spoke, a tall, thin man came to the table, and laid his hand on Dick Carleton's shoulder. So doing, he stood looking straight into Madame d'Ambre's face. She started a little, and blushed deeply. Blushes were a great stock-in-trade with Madame d'Ambre. They proved that, unlike Clo-

tilde et Cie., she did not paint her face: that she was altogether a different order of being. But this blush was less successful than usual. It was a flush of annoyance, and showed that she was vexed.

The man was more American in type than Carleton, though indefinably so. If a critic had been asked how he would know this person to be a New Yorker, even if met wrapped in bearskins at the North Pole, he might have been at a loss to explain. Nevertheless, the dark face with its twinkling, heavily black-lashed blue eyes, its short, wavy black hair turning gray at the temples, its prominent nose and chin, lips and jaws slightly aggressive in their firmness, was the distilled essence of New York. So were the strong, lean figure, and the nervous, virile hands.

"Hello, Jim!" exclaimed Carleton, turning quickly at the touch on his shoulder. "I've only played with a dish or two. I was waiting for you, really." He got up, and rather shyly introduced the party to his host of the celebrated Stellamare.

"I have the pleasure of knowing this lady slightly, already," said Schuyler, still fixing Madeleine with his straight, disconcerting gaze.

"Madame d'Ambre?"

"I don't think we knew each other's name. I had the honour of doing a small — a very small — service for Madame, such a service as any man may be allowed to do for a lady at Monte Carlo."

If he laid an emphasis on the last two words, it

was hardly strong enough to be noticed, unless by the person most concerned.

"Do sit down with us, and eat the Welsh rabbit Carleton has been talking about," said Hannaford. "This is my show. I shall be delighted, and I'm sure I speak for the ladies."

Madame d'Ambre murmured something, and Mary smiled a more than ordinarily friendly smile; for she knew that this was the distant cousin of whom she had heard from Peter, the "Jim" who, in Molly Maxwell's eyes, was an heroic figure. Peter never tired of telling anecdotes of Jim's wonderful feats of finance, his coolness and daring in times of black panic or perilous uncertainty in Wall Street, his scholarly attainments, of which he never spoke; his passion for music and gardens, and other contradictory traits such as no one would have expected in a keen business man. Sometimes Mary had fancied that Peter was a little inclined to fall in love with Jim Schuyler, perhaps because he was one of the few men she knew who did not grovel at her feet. Now Mary looked at the man with intense interest, and could imagine a girl like Molly Maxwell making him her hero, in spite of the difference between their ages. Molly was not twenty-one. He must be thirty-eight or forty, and would have looked hard if it had not been for the blue eyes which might soften dangerously under certain influences.

Mary's first impulse on hearing his name was to cry out, "Why, your cousin Molly Maxwell is my

best friend!" But something imperatively stopped her. Deep down under the excitement and pleasure of this adventure into which fate had plunged her, murmured a little voice, saying, "You ought not to have come to this place alone, when they all trusted you to go straight to Florence." And if she were doing wrong and meant to keep on doing wrong, she must not associate herself with Saint Ursula-of-the-Lake, in the minds of people here. It would not be fair to the convent and Reverend Mother, not even fair to Aunt Sara and Elinor, who believed her to be journeying obediently toward Florence. Thinking thus, she determined to say nothing of her own life to those she might meet at Monte Carlo. Soon she would go away, and no real harm would have been done to any one. As for this supper, if she had lingering doubts that it was not quite "the thing" to have accepted, the name of Jim Schuyler chased them away like clouds before the sun. It was like being with an old friend to have Peter's cousin there; and Dick Carleton was staying with him. Mr. Carleton and Captain Hannaford were friends, and Mr. Schuyler evidently knew Madame d'Ambre, so everything had turned out delightfully. Also it was exciting to see how people who came in looked at her and whispered. She could not help knowing that they said, "There's the girl who won so much in the Casino that everybody rushed to her table and applauded."

It was wonderful, intoxicating, to be the heroine of such a place, to have experienced players envy

her. She longed for to-morrow morning, so that she might go back to the same table at the Casino, and play on zero and twenty-four again. "I think I shall always make that my game, and go to the same table," she said to herself, with the unconscious egotism and vanity of a child.

"What was that I caught as I arrived, about 'finding out the great secret?'" Schuyler asked, when he sat down at a place made for him on Madame d'Ambre's right hand. Again he fixed his eyes on her, this time with polite interest. "I thought the words sounded familiar. I remember your saying something of the sort, I'm sure, the evening of our first meeting."

"I do not recall it, Monsieur," replied Madeleine.

"It was on the Casino terrace," he went on, reflectively. "I was walking there between the first and second acts of an opera, about a fortnight ago. We met, and you seemed depressed, Madame. It was then I was able to do you that small service."

"I did not think of it as a service," she said, bitterly.

"Ah, now the occasion has come back to you. What, not a service when a lady has a little bottle of poison stuck into her belt, and a man drinks it himself rather than she should keep her threat and swallow it!"

"It was not a threat. I would have drunk the poison and ended everything," she insisted.

"If I hadn't been so selfish and greedy as to take it out of your hand and sample it. Strange it did

me no harm. I had a presentiment it wouldn't, somehow. But of course my system may be poison-proof. By the way, isn't that the same pretty little bottle I see now, tucked into your belt! And were you thinking of trying its effect again to-night, if these friends hadn't come in time to cheer you up, and so put off the evil day?"

"You are very cruel to make sport of my tragedy, Monsieur!" Madame d'Ambre exclaimed, her soft wistfulness flashing into anger. "These sympathetic ones have saved me from myself by their generosity. They have made me happy. Why do you go out of your way to remind me of misery?"

Schuyler's blue eyes twinkled cynically, yet not unkindly. "I quite understand that you can be saved from yourself only by sufficient generosity, Madame," he said. "The question is, what is sufficient? Too much sometimes goes to the head. Far be it from me to upset your cup of happiness. But drink wisely, Madame, in little sips, not in great gulps. It's better for the health — of all concerned. And the contents of your bottle will no doubt be just as efficacious another time."

"I know what you mean," she flung at him, viperishly. "You have heard of Mademoiselle's luck to-night. You think I mean to take advantage of her. I would not ——"

"Of course not, Madame. You, the widow of a naval officer! Have I accused you of anything?" Schuyler cut her short, with sudden gayety of manner. "I've heard of Mademoiselle's luck. She was

pointed out to me by a man I know, as I came in, just before joining you. But as I'm aware that you're a good business woman, my idea is that the advantage you'll take won't amount to more than 5 per cent. More would be usury, and give Mademoiselle an unfavourable idea of Monte Carlo manners."

He spoke with deliberation, allotting each word its full value; and before Madame d'Ambre could leash her rage, he turned to Mary. "Talking of Monte Carlo manners," he took up the theme again, "you mustn't judge hastily. There isn't *one* Monte Carlo. There are many. I don't suppose you ever saw a cocktail of any sort, much less one called the 'rainbow?' It's in several different coloured layers of liquid, each distinct from the other, as far as taste and appearance are concerned, though they blend together as you drink. It wouldn't do to sip the top layer, and say what the decoction was like, before you absorbed the whole — with discrimination. Well, that cocktail's something like Monte Carlo. Only you begin the cocktail at the top. In the Monte Carlo rainbow you sometimes begin at the bottom."

He looked steadily at Mary as he finished his simile. Then he lifted the silver cover of a dish which had just arrived, and gave his whole attention to a noble Welsh rabbit, an odd dainty for a Riviera supper — but Ciro prided himself on gratifying any whim of any customer, at five minutes' notice.

Captain Hannaford had listened in silence, with a light of malicious amusement in his eyes, which travelled from Madeleine to Mary, from Mary to Madeleine, and occasionally to Dick Carleton.

Mary, despite her blank ignorance of the world and its ways, was far from stupid or slow of understanding. She realized that Schuyler's harangue to Madame d'Ambre was all, or almost all, for her: and she caught his meaning in the last sentence of the rainbow allegory. He wanted her to know that she had "begun at the bottom," and must beware. She was half vexed, half grateful; vexed for Madeleine, and grateful for herself, because, being Peter's hero, he must be a good man, who would not be cruel to a woman for sheer love of cruelty. But her shamed pity for Madeleine was stronger than her gratitude; and instead of giving less out of her winnings than she had planned to give, she impulsively decided to give more; this, not because she believed in or liked Madeleine d'Ambre, but because she winced under a sister woman's humiliation. The ugly flash in the eyes that had been wistful, shocked her. She saw that they were cat-coloured eyes, and Jim Schuyler scored as he meant to score, in her resolve to pay Madame d'Ambre well, then gently to slip out of her friendship.

"When we finish supper, she can go with me to my hotel, and we'll divide the money into three parts," Mary said to herself. "I'll give her two, and keep one. Even one will be like a little fortune; and whatever happens I'll keep enough to get away

with; but I *must* play again to-morrow. It's too wonderful to stop yet."

But she was reckoning without Jim Schuyler.

When he saw the eyes of Madeleine hint that it was time to go, he said quickly, "Well, Mademoiselle, have you counted your winnings, and do you know exactly what they amount to?"

"No," said Mary, "not yet. I thought Madame d'Ambre and I might do that afterward."

"Can't we save you the trouble?" he asked. "Why not spread your store here on the table, and let us all work out the calculation? Everybody knows you broke the bank, so there's no imprudence or ostentation in displaying your wealth."

Without a word, Mary accepted the suggestion, since not to do so would have seemed ungrateful.

"She's given away a lot already," said Carleton. "I saw her distributing *mille* notes to lovely but unfortunate gamblers, as if she were dealing out biscuits."

"Oh, I gave away only four," Mary excused herself. "They were nothing."

Everybody laughed except Madeleine.

The fat stacks of French banknotes were extracted with some effort from the hand-bag into which they had been stuffed. Captain Hannaford and Schuyler counted while the others watched, Carleton with amused interest, Mary with comparative indifference, because the actual money meant less to her than the thrill of winning it, and Madame d'Ambre on the verge of tears. She

considered that she was being robbed of her rights, for she knew that this merciless man with the hard jaw and pleasant blue eyes intended to keep her hands off the money.

"One hundred and nine thousand francs!" Schuyler announced at last. "I congratulate you, Mademoiselle. And I wish you'd let me advise you."

"If I did, what would you say?" Mary smiled.

"I should say: 'Go home to-morrow.'"

"But I've just come away from home. I don't want to go back"

"Well, then, go to some other place, a place without a Casino."

"I suppose that's good advice," said Mary. "But — I can't take it yet."

"I'm sorry," returned Peter's cousin.

The whole conversation had been in French from the first, as Madame d'Ambre knew little English; and Mary's accent was so perfect that to an American or English ear it passed as Parisian. Neither Hannaford, Schuyler, nor Carleton supposed that she had just arrived from England, though her name — if they had caught it correctly — was English or Scotch. "Mademoiselle" they called her, and wondering who and what she was, vaguely associated her with France, probably Paris.

"How long shall you stay?" asked Carleton, in the pause that followed.

"I don't know," Mary said. "A few days, perhaps."

"Will you come down to the Condamine and see my hydro-aeroplane to-morrow? I'm keeping her there, and practising a bit in the harbour, before taking her to Nice."

"Oh, I should love to! I've never seen any sort of aeroplane, not even a picture of one."

"That's clever and original of you, anyhow. Where have you been, to avoid them? What time to-morrow? Is ten o'clock too early?"

Mary blushed. "Would afternoon suit you? I feel as if I should have luck again, if I played in the morning."

"Afternoon, of course," Carleton assented politely, though he was disappointed; for in giving the invitation he had been following his friend's lead in trying to save the moth from the candle. "Shall we say three o'clock? I'll call for you."

"We'll both call, with my car," said Schuyler. "But what about that 5 per cent. which I suppose you want to give your roulettle teacher?" he went on, with apparent carelessness.

"I want to give her more," Mary confessed, with that soft obstinacy which people found difficult to combat.

But Schuyler had weapons for padded barricades. He turned to Madeleine. "I'm certain that Madame will refuse to accept more," he said.

She faced him defiantly. Then her eyes fell. She dared not make him an active enemy. Though he never gambled, he was a man of influence at the Casino, for he was a friend of those highest in

authority, and had power "on the Rock," also, for the Prince and he were on visiting terms. Madeleine d'Ambre had learned these details since the evening on the terrace when he had tested her "poison."

"Yes, I — should refuse to accept," she echoed, morosely.

"Virtue is its own reward; and there may be others," Schuyler said as he deducted a sum equal to 5 per cent. from Mary's winnings and pushed it across the table.

But even this was not the end of his interference. When Madeleine rose and Mary sprang up obediently, he proposed that they, the three men, should see the ladies home. This plan was carried out; and when Mary had been left at the door of the Hôtel de Paris, they insisted on taking Madame d'Ambre at once down the hill to her lodgings in the Condamine. The penance was made only a little lighter to the victim by a lift in Schuyler's automobile. She was far from grateful to its owner, and made no answer except a twist of the shoulders to his last words: "Remember not to change your mind. It isn't safe in this climate."

When they had dropped Hannaford at his hotel, also in the Condamine, Carleton lost no time in satisfying his curiosity. "I never saw you take so much trouble, Jim, over a woman. Is it a case of love at first sight, old man?"

"Bosh!" said Schuyler. "Don't you know me better? That girl puzzles me. There's something

very odd about her. I'm conceited enough to think I can generally size people up pretty well at first sight, but she beats me. I can't make her out. And besides ——"

"Besides — what?"

"I know I never saw her before, yet her face seems familiar. I associate her with — it's idiotic — but with the person I care for most in the world. Heaven knows why. I don't."

"Do I know who that person is?" Carleton ventured, unable to resist the temptation.

"No, you don't know," the older man returned, rather gruffly. "And I'm pretty sure you never will, because the less I talk or think about that person the better for me. That part of the story has nothing to do with the case. There's only this queer impression of mine. And I had a weird feeling as if it were my bounden duty to see that this little girl wasn't victimized by an unscrupulous woman. So I did what I could."

"I should think you did!" exclaimed the other. "I couldn't have done as much. Poor Madame d'Ambre."

"Her real name's probably the French for Smith, without a 'de' in it, unless it's to spell devil. If she's a widow, she's a grassy one. Her game is to be found crying on the Casino terrace by moonlight, preparatory to drinking poison, because she's tired of life and its temptations. If it's a young lieutenant just off his ship for a flutter at Monte, or some other lamb of that fleeciness, he's soon shorn.

There's quite a good living in it, I understand. She always contrives to make the youngsters believe her an innocent angel, whom they must try to save."

"But you seem to have been on in that act. Was it a moonlight scene?"

"Plenty of moonshine — and clear enough for me to see through the angelhood to the designing minxhood. The poison was water, coloured, I should think, with cochineal, and pleasantly flavoured with a little bitter almond. But — well, one sees through people sometimes, as if they were jelly-fish, and yet is a little sorry for them just because they *are* jelly-fish, stranded on the beach."

"I see," said Carleton.

They were spinning along the white way that winds between mountain and sea, out of the principality, and so toward Cap Martin, Mentone, and on to Italy. The tramcars had ceased to run; the endless daytime procession of motor-cars and carriages was broken by the hours of sleep, and the glimmering road was empty save for immense, white-covered carts which had come from distant Lombardy, and over Alpine passes, bringing eggs and vegetables for the guests of Hercules. Slowly, yet steadily, shambled the tired mules, and would shamble on till dawn. There were often no lights on the carts, which moved silently, like mammoth ghosts, great lumbering vehicle after vehicle, each drawn by three or four mules or horses. As the lamps of Schuyler's powerful car flashed on them

round sharp rock-corners, tearing the veil of shadow, they loomed up unexpectedly in the night, like some mystery suddenly revealed in a place of peace.

Schuyler liked motoring at night on the Riviera; for he never tired of the dark forms of mountains, cut out black in the creamy foam of star-spattered clouds, or the salt smell of the sea and its murmur, singing the same song Greeks and Romans had heard on these shores. He never tired of meeting the huge carts from Italy, travelling slowly through the dark. He always had the same keen, foolish wish to know whence they came, and what were the thoughts behind the bright eyes which waked from sleep and stared for an instant, as his lamps pried under the great quaking canopies: and more than all he enjoyed arriving at his own gate, seeing the pale shimmer of his marble statues against backgrounds of ivy and ilex, and drawing in the sweetness of his orange blossoms and roses. Because he never tired of these things the two months at Stellamare, often spent alone except for servants, were the best months of his year. Through stress and strain he thought of them, as a thirsty man thinks of a long draught of cool water; and he spent them quietly, living in each moment: not complicating his leisure with many acquaintances or amusements, and neither vexed nor pleased because people called him selfish, and gossipped about his palace in a garden as a place mysterious and secret. He was not quite in Paradise in his retreat there, because he

was not a perfectly happy man; but he did not expect perfect happiness, and hoped for nothing better on earth than his lonely holidays at Stellamare.

Descending a steep hill toward the sea as the big car slipped between tall marble gate-posts, a perfume as of all the sweetest flowers of the world, gathered in a bouquet, was flung into the two men's faces. In the distance, beyond the house whose windows suddenly lit up as if by magic, a wide semicircle of marble columns glimmered pale against the sea's deep indigo. And away across the stretch of quiet water glittered the amazing jewels of Monte Carlo.

"By Jove! no Roman emperor could have had a lovelier garden, or a more splendid palace on this coast," said Carleton, as he stood on the steps of the house modelled after the description of Pliny's villa at Laurentum. "Your greatest wish must be fulfilled."

"My greatest wish," Schuyler echoed, with a faint sigh. And in the starlight his face lost its hard lines. But Carleton did not see.

The door was thrown open by an old Italian servant, who had the profile of a captive Saracen king.

They went in together, and left the night full of perfume, and the song of little waves fringed with starlight, that broke on the rocks like fairy-gold — the vanishing fairy-gold of the Casino across the water.

And at the same moment (for it was very late) the dazzling illumination of the Casino terrace was dimmed, as if half the diamonds had been shut up in velvet cases.

A great peace fell upon the night, as though the throbbing of a passionate heart had ceased.

X

Vanno Della Robbia wished to think no more of the false stars that he had followed; for there was every reason now to believe them false stars. Yet something deep down in him refused to believe this; and he could not help thinking of them as before. But he would not give way to what seemed like weakness, and so he fought against the memory.

If he had come to Monte Carlo only for the sake of the girl, he would have left again next morning. Having come for other things, however, it would have been weaker to go than stay. His brother and sister-in-law had not arrived yet at their villa at Cap Martin, and were not due for some days, as Angelo had taken his bride to Ireland, to show her to a much loved cousin, the Duchess of Clare. Also there was the week of aviation, to which Vanno had been looking forward with interest during the voyage from Alexandria to Marseilles. A parachute which he had invented was to be used for the first time.

Though he could not help thinking of the eyes which haunted him with their lure of purity and innocence, he would not concern himself further with the comings and goings of Miss M. Grant of

London. He went instead about his own affairs. He slept badly; but Vanno was accustomed to taking little sleep, therefore it did not occur to him to be tired because he woke finally at seven, after having lain awake till the ringing of Ste. Devote's five o'clock bells, down in the ravine. Instead, he felt a kind of burning energy which forced him to activity of some sort. After his cold bath he dressed quickly, and went out to walk, wishing himself back in the Libyan desert, where he had not seen or thought of any woman.

It was only half-past seven, and the sun was still low in the east, just rising above the mountains of Italy. It shone through a slit in two long purple clouds, and its shining lit the sea. Vanno ran down the steps to the Casino terrace, coming upon it near the clump of nymphlike palms, and the marble bust of Berlioz that Mary could see from her window. Hercules' Rock was on fire with sunrise, and the Prince's palace looked in the magic flame like a strange Valhalla.

Not a soul was to be seen, not even a gardener employed by the Casino, and all the watching eyes of the horned animal were asleep. Vanno stared at the great cream-white building with a brooding resentment, because of the influence which he believed it to exert over his clouded star. He fancied that she had been drawn here by its extraordinary magnetism which pulsed like electricity across Europe; and that, if she had not already been swept off her feet, soon she would be, and her soul drowned.

To his own surprise, he could himself feel the mysterious power of the place. As he looked at the long windows framed in rose-red marble he remembered what his Arab friend, the astrologer in the desert, had said to him about this month of December.

"Could it be possible, if there were anything in the science of astrology," Vanno asked himself, "that the stars could rule the chances in a game of chance?" Vaguely he thought, with the mystic side of his nature, that to study, and prove or disprove this idea, might be interesting. But the side that was stern and ascetic thrust away the suggestion. He remembered the thousands of people who drifted here from all over the world, hoping for one reason or other to get the gold guarded by this big white dragon. Some perhaps believed in their stars; others had studied systems, and tried them on little roulette wheels at home; but nearly all went away defeated. The form of the long, high mountain called the Tête de Chien looked to Vanno like a giant man lying face down in despair, the shape of his head, his back, and supine legs tragic in desperate abandon. "That's a symbol," Vanno said, half aloud, and felt no longer the strange pulling at his heartstrings which for a moment had drawn him, too, under the influence. He thought of himself as one of the few, the very few, people within a wide range of Monte Carlo for whom the Casino meant nothing. For surely there were few indeed. Even the peasants

among the mountains owed their living indirectly to the Casino. Because of its existence they were able to command large prices for their fruit and flowers and vegetables, or anything they could produce which pleasure-lovers drawn by the Casino could possibly want. Over there on the Rock, where red roofs of houses crowded closely together, everybody lived in one way or other by the Casino. No one, Vanno had been told, who was not Monegasque by birth or nationalization was allowed to live on the Rock. Probably many of the croupiers in the Casino and their families had houses there, and perhaps many were shopkeepers down in the Condamine, where the cheap hotels and lodging-houses were. Few of those hotels, or the more luxurious ones at Monte Carlo itself, would exist if it were not for the Casino, and the whole Riviera would be less prosperous. But Vanno was persuaded that he cared nothing for the gold of the dragon.

Once before, when he was almost a boy, he had come here with his brother Angelo for a few days. They had gone to see the Prince, whose ancient family, the Grimaldis, was older and more important even than the house of Rienzi. Vanno had promised Angelo that he would call at the palace this time, and he decided to do so formally in the afternoon; the morning he resolved to spend in walking up to La Turbie and down again. The exercise would clear his brain; and he fancied that he remembered the way well enough to find it again without asking directions.

There was something else he might do also, if there were time. A priest whom, as a boy, he had known well at Monte Della Robbia was now curé at Roquebrune. They corresponded, and in coming to the Riviera, Vanno had planned to look him up. He was in a mood to want a full day's programme.

In a few moments' walking he left Monte Carlo behind and came out upon the open hillside, where, above him, he saw the path leading skyward like an interminable staircase. Often as he mounted, bareheaded, his hat in his hand, he caught himself mentally trespassing on forbidden ground, thinking of his lost Giulietta, and wondering what she had been doing, every day and hour of her life since she was a child. He had never felt this pressing, insistent curiosity about any human being before. His thoughts followed the girl everywhere, wherever she might be; and something — the same Something which refused to disbelieve in her — seemed to know where she was at that moment, even how she looked, and what was in her soul, though his outer intelligence could see nothing. That rebellious Something longed to turn back toward Monte Carlo, to keep near her and guard her. It cried out strongly to do this, but Vanno would not listen. He sang to himself as he walked up the mule path among olive trees; and peasants coming down from the mountains, their nailed boots rattling on the cobblestones, were singing, too, strange wordless songs without tune, songs neither French nor Italian, but with a wild eastern lilt leaping out of

their monotony, reminiscent of the days when Saracens ruled the coast. Some faces, too, were like the faces of eastern men, high featured, with enormous, flashing eyes. Here and there was one of a bold yet dreamy, gray-eyed, brown-haired type Vanno had not met before in any of his travels. He remembered that this country had belonged to the Ligurians before his ancestors, the Romans, took it after two hundred years' hard fighting: and types are persistent. He had heard that there were ruined Ligurian forts to be traced still, among the higher hills and mountains; and the monument of La Turbie, whither he was bound, was Augustus Cæsar's emblem of triumph over the Ligurian tribes.

The funicular was not running at this hour, and the white lacings of the Upper Corniche were empty save for a cart or two, bringing down loads of wall-flower-tinted stone from some mountain quarry, for the building of a villa. Vanno had easily found his way on to a mule path, rough yet well kept, and ancient perhaps as the hidden Ligurian forts. Round him was the gray-green shimmer of olive trees, and their old, thick roots that crawled and climbed the rocks were like knotted snakes asleep. Bands of pines marched and mourned along the skyline, and in the midst of glittering laurels cypress trees stood up straight and black as burnt-out torches.

Clouds that had darkened the east when Vanno started veiled the sun now, like lazy eyelids. The gay glitter was gone from the world, and the

sea was of a dull velvety gray, dappled with silver-gleams that sifted through holes in the clouds, making the water look like scales on a fish's back. Far below lay the strip of frivolous fairyland, all that most strangers know of the Riviera: the pleasure towns with their palms and tropical flowers, the decorated villas, to live in which Vanno thought would be like living in hollowed-out birthday cakes. And the soft, thoughtful grayness which was dimming the sunshine suited this different, higher world as well as it suited his mood. The loveliness of trees, and the pale splendour of mountain peaks carved in bas-relief against the pearl-gray sky, rang out to his soul like a chime of bells from a cathedral tower, giving him back the mastery of himself. It was good to be here, where there were no sounds except the voice of Nature, singing her eternal song, in the universal language, and where the life of man seemed as distant as the far-down windows that glittered mysteriously out of shadows, as the eyes of a cat glitter at night.

Inarticulate, enchanting whispers of the love and joy which have been in the world and may be again floated up to Vanno's imagination like the chanting of mermaids heard under the sea. He felt that, if he should meet his Giulietta now, he would believe in her, and his belief would make her worthy of itself, if she were not already worthy. "May the wings of our souls never fail us," he said aloud, as if it were a prayer.

Almost before the time when Vanno Della Robbia

had known words enough to clothe his most childish thoughts, he had possessed an unknown land, a kingdom and a castle of his own more beautiful than sunset clouds. To this land he always travelled when he was alone, and often at night in dreams. It had been around him in the desert where his errand had been to study the eastern stars; and the observatory at Monte Della Robbia, built with money left him by his mother, was one gateway to that land. When he was in this secret kingdom he was brother to the stars. All knowledge came echoing through his soul, as if whispered to him by past selves, other incarnations of himself, who had gleaned it in their lives, from days when the world was young. He had a thousand souls, which had known great sorrows and joys and adventures. His blood seemed to smoke gold, like spray on rushing surf in sunshine. Never had he admitted any one he had known (except the people his own mind created for inhabitants of that kingdom) into his land; but now the girl whose name he scarcely knew stood at the door of the castle, asking to come in, saying with her eyes, which he had likened to stars, that she was the princess who had a right to live there. Hers was the face of his dream. She was the song of the mermaids. The voice he had heard — would always hear in the sea — spoke of her. She was the light of the morning. Hers the face in the sunrise, and the twilight. If he lost her, still her spirit would haunt him, in music, in all beauty, for she was the one woman, the ideal which

is the heart of a man's heart. She must be worthy, because there was no other princess for this kingdom of his, east of the sun and west of the moon; and without her the rooms of the castle would hold only echoes.

Vanno would have died rather than speak out such thoughts to any one on earth, for they were the property of that self which his brother Angelo said was at war with the other self, the self which the world knew.

Now and then, as he walked up the mule path with a step which became lighter with the lightness of the air, he threw a word in Italian to a passing peasant, some Ligurian-looking man who drove a bright-coloured market garden ending in a donkey's head and tail. Eyes and teeth flashed comprehension, but the answer was in a queer *patois*, a hotch-potch of Latin, Italian, French, and Arabic.

On the top of the mountain Vanno breakfasted, at a pink hotel fantastically built in hybrid Moorish style. From his window-table he could see the Tour de Supplice on a height below; a broken column of stone said to mark the place where Romans tortured and executed their prisoners. Far beneath lay the Rock of Hercules and Monte Carlo, the four unequal horns of the great white animal springing saliently to the eye even at this height. To the right, the great iron-gray bulk of the Tête de Chien hid the promontories which, like immense prehistoric reptiles, swam out to sea beyond Beaulieu; but to the left were the mountains of Italy,

their highest ridges marbled with dazzling snow; and Cap Martin's green length was frilled with silver ripples.

Still Vanno was happy, as he had not been since he saw Mary dining alone in the restaurant of the Hôtel de Paris. He had made a plan for the next hours, which gave him hope for the future.

After breakfast, he walked into the gray and ancient mountain-village of La Turbie, whose old houses and walls of tunnelled streets were built from the wreckage of Cæsar's Trophy. Jewish faces peered at him from high, dark windows, for here it was that, in the Middle Ages, Jews fled from persecution, and made La Turbie a Jewish settlement. Even in the newer town of pink and blue and yellow houses there were Jewish faces to be seen in dusky shops where fruit was displayed for sale, in heaps like many-coloured jewels.

Just beyond the oldest outskirts Vanno came to the foot of the monument, unspeakably majestic still, though long ago stripped of its splendid marbles, and its statues that commemorated Cæsar's triumph. Men were working in the shadow of the vast column of stone and crumbling Roman brick, digging for lost knowledge in the form of broken inscriptions, hands and heads of statues, bits of carved cornice, and a hundred buried treasures by means of which the historical puzzle-picture might gradually be matched together. Vanno became interested, and spent an hour watching and talking to the superintendent of the work, a cul-

tured archæologist. When he began his descent of the mountain, a train on the funicular railroad was feeling its way cautiously down the steep mountainside, like a child on tiptoe. A little weak, irritable sniff came up from its engine as the toy train paused at one of the three stopping places below La Turbie. It was like a very young girl blowing her nose after crying.

Vanno did not go down to the low levels; but asking the way of an old peasant whose head was wrapped in a red handkerchief, he learned how to find the hill-village of Roquebrune, keeping to the mule paths. He had made up his mind to invite himself to lunch with his old friend the curé.

This was another world from the world of the Casino and shops and hotels. The very air was different; nimble, and crystal clear. All the perfumes were aromatic; balsam of pine, and the country sweetness of thyme and mint, the pure breath of nature. Sloping down the mountains eastward toward Italy and descending more than halfway from La Turbie, Vanno came to the rock-town with the ruined castle which Mary had looked up to from Monte Carlo in last night's sunset. It seemed to have slid from a taller height above, and to have been arrested by miracle before much harm was done; and Vanno remembered the curé's first letter which had told him the legend of the place: how Roquebrune in punishment for the sins of its inhabitants was shaken off its high eyrie by a great earthquake, but stopped on the shoulder of the

mountain through intercession of the Virgin, the special patron *sainte vierge* of the district. The town and its dominating castle seen from below showed as if flattened against the mountain's breast; but coming into the place on foot, the mountain retired into the background, and the huge mediæval ruin was sovereign lord of all.

The whole village had been made by robbing the castle of brick and stone, as La Turbie was built of the Trophy. The castle itself grew out of the rock, so that it was difficult to see where nature's work ended or men's began; and the old, old houses crowding up to and huddled against its foundations had cramped themselves into ledges and boulders like men making their last stand in a mountain battle. The streets were tunnels, with vistas of long, dark stone stairways running up and down into mystery. Here and there above secretive doorways were beautiful carvings set into the thick stone walls, relics of the castle's decorations. At sharp corners were tiny shops with dark interiors, and strange assortments of golden oranges, big pearly onions, ruby beets, and bright green, peasant pottery in low-browed windows and on uneven doorsteps. Dark Saracen eyes gleamed out of the cold shadows in tunnelled streets, seeming to warm them with their light; and as Vanno reached the tiny *Place* where towered a large, old church, the pavement was flooded by a wave of brown-faced boys and girls, laughing and shouting. School was just out; and behind the children followed a man in the

black cassock of a priest. He was walking slowly, reading from a little book. Vanno stood still, with eagerness and affection in his eyes, and willed him to look up.

This man had been the Prince's tutor, after Vanno was six, until he had passed his tenth birthday. It was years now since they had seen each other, eight perhaps, for it must be as long ago that the curé had come back to visit Rome. But the cheery, intelligent dark face had not changed much, except that it was less round, and the silvering of the once black hair had spiritualized it strangely.

The wave of children, after glances thrown at the newcomer, had ebbed away in different directions. The little cobble-paved *Place* became suddenly still. The priest moved leisurely, reading his book. Then, when he was quite near Vanno, he suddenly lifted his thick black lashes as if a voice had called his name. His good brown eyes and sunburned face lit up as though in a flash of sunlight.

"Principino!" he exclaimed.

Vanno grasped both his hands, book and all.

"What a happy surprise!" cried the curé, in Italian, and Vanno answered in the same language.

"But you knew I was coming one of these days. You got my letter? And perhaps Angelo has written?"

"Yes. He has written. I am to take the second breakfast with him and his bride one day soon after they arrive at Cap Martin, and bless their villa for them. You see, he too remembers the

poor old friend!" and the curé smiled, a charming smile, showing beautiful teeth, strong and white as a boy's. "He said you would meet him, for the week of the flying men, but that is not quite yet. And your letter said the same. I did not look for you till some days later."

"Well, here I am," cried Vanno. "I came only yesterday afternoon, and my first thought is for you, Father. You look just the same. It might be months instead of years since we saw each other last! Will you give me lunch? I had only a cup of coffee and a croissant at La Turbie, and I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"A wolf this shepherd is not afraid to let into his fold. Will I *not* give you lunch? Though, alas! not being prepared for an honoured guest, it will hardly be worth your eating. If you have changed, my Principino, it is for the better. From a youth you have become a man."

They walked together across the *Place,* Vanno very slim and tall beside the shorter, squarer figure of the man of fifty. Into the church the curé led the Prince, and through the cool, incense-laden dusk to a door standing wide open. Outside was a green brightness, which made the doorway in the twilit church look like a huge block of flawed emerald set into the wall.

"My garden," said the priest, speaking affectionately, as of a loved child. "I think, Principino, you would like your *déjeûner* in the grape arbour. It is only a little arbour, and the garden is small.

But wait, you will see it has a charm that many grander gardens lack."

They stepped from the brown dusk of the church out into the bright picture of a garden, which seemed unreal, a little garden in a dream, as complete and perfect in its way, Vanno thought, as an old Persian prayer rug.

It was a tangle of orange and lemon trees, looped with garlands of roses and flowering creepers, carpeted with a thousand fragrant, old-fashioned flowers, and arboured with grapevines whose last year's leaves, though sparse, were still russet and gold: altogether a mere bright ribbon of beauty pinned like a lover's knot on a high shoulder of jutting rock. Below fell a precipice, overhanging steep slopes of vineyard, or orange plantations that went sliding down toward the far-off level of the sea, and the world of the strangers. Above, towered the ruined castle, immensely tall, its foundation-stones bedded in dark rock and draped in ivy. In the little garden, the hum of bees among the flowers was like an echo of far off, fairy harps.

"I think I am dreaming this," said Vanno. And he added, to himself: "It's part of my kingdom, that I never saw before."

The curé laughed, delighted. "Luckily for me it is real," he said. "And now that you are in it, my Principino — my one-time pupil, my all-time friend — it is perfect. I should like you to love it. I should like — yes, I should like some great happiness to come into your life here. That is an odd

fancy, isn't it? for the great happiness seems likely to be mine in having you with me. But the idea sprang into my mind."

"It is a good idea," said Vanno. "I should like it to come true. I have a favour to ask you, and perhaps — who knows? — your granting it may somehow bring the wish to pass."

A tiny figure of a woman — so old, so fragile as to look as if she were made of transparent porcelain — appeared as he spoke from an arbour at the far end of the little garden, an arbour whose grapevines hung bannerlike over the precipice. She had a dish in her minute, wrinkled hands, and was so surprised at sight of the tall young stranger that she nearly dropped it.

"My little housekeeper," explained the curé. "She comes to me for a few hours every day, to keep me fed and tidy; and she brings my meals here to the arbour when the weather is fine; for I never tire of the view, and it gives me an appetite that nothing else does."

"I see now why your letters have always been so happy," Vanno said, "and why, when it was offered, you refused promotion in order to stay here."

"Oh, yes, I am very happy, thank Heaven, and I do my best to make others so. God loves mirth. Dulness is of the devil! I love the place and the people, and the people love me, I trust," the curé answered, with a bright and curiously spiritual smile which transfigured the sunburned face. "You have no idea, my Principino, of the thousand inter-

ests we have here in this little mountain village. Once it was of great importance. An English king came in the fourteenth century to visit the Lascaris family at the castle. Those down below hardly know of its existence, even those who come back year after year, but Roquebrune and my garden are world enough for me. Is breakfast ready, Mademoiselle Luciola? Thanks; we will begin as soon as you have brought things to lay another place. Is that not a good name for the wee body — Firefly? Oh, but you should see our fireflies here in May, when the Riviera is supposed to be wiped off the map, not existent till winter. And the glow-worms. I have three in my garden. No garden is complete without at least one glow-worm. I had to beg my first from a neighbour."

"I should like to live up here, and be your neighbour, and cultivate glow-worms," said Vanno, as his host guided him along a narrow path which led between flower-beds to the arbour.

"Why not?" cried the priest, enraptured. "You could buy beautiful land, a plateau of orange trees and olives, carpeted with violets — the petite campagne I spoke of. You could build a villa, small enough to shut up and put to sleep when you tired of it. We would be your caretakers, the old Mademoiselle and I."

"Would you have me live in my villa alone?" Vanno smiled.

The curé looked merrily sly. "Why not with a

bride?" he ventured. "Why not follow your brother Angelo's example?"

'I must see his bride first, to judge whether his example is worth following. We haven't met yet."

"Ah," exclaimed the priest, "that reminds me of rather a strange thing! There came a lady here — but I will tell you, Principino, while we lunch."

Beaming with pleasure in his hospitality, the curé ushered his guest into the arbour, which, like a seabird's nest, almost overhung the cliff. Under shelter of the thick old grapevine and a pink cataract of roses, a common deal table was spread with coarse but spotless damask. In a green saucer of peasant ware, one huge pink rose floated in water. The effect was more charming than any bouquet. There was nothing to eat but brown bread with creamy cheese, and grapes of a curious colour like amber and amethysts melted and run together; yet to Vanno it seemed a feast.

The curé explained that the grapes had been grown on this arbour, and that he had them to eat and to give away, all winter. When the porcelain doll of a woman came back, she brought a bottle of home-made wine for Vanno, and some little sponge cakes. But when the Prince said that in England such cakes were named "lady fingers," the curé laughed gayly, and pretended to be horrified. This brought him back to his story, which, in the excitement of helping his guest to food, he had almost forgotten.

"I was going to tell you," he went on, "of a strange thing, and a lady unknown to me, who called here. She was from England, I should say."

Vanno's heart gave a quick throb. "Could it be possible?" he wondered. "Was she young and beautiful?" he asked aloud. But the answer dashed his rather childish hope.

"Not beautiful, and not a girl, but young still. 'Striking' would be the word to express her. And her age, about thirty."

Vanno lost interest. "Why was it so strange that she should call?" he inquired. "People must find their way here sometimes, even those who haven't you for a friend."

"Yes, sometimes; and I am glad to see them. This was strange only because the lady knew that I was a friend of your family. She came because of that, and put a great many questions; but she refused to tell her name. She said it was not necessary to mention it."

Interest came back again in a degree. "What was she like?" the Prince wanted to know.

The curé thought for a moment, and answered slowly. "I can see her still," he said, "because there was something different about her from any one else I ever saw. As she came toward me in the *Place*, where you and I met, she looked like a statue moving, her face was so white, and her eyes seemed to be white, too, like the eyes of a statue. But when she drew nearer, I saw that they were a pale, whitish blue, rimmed with thin lines of black. There was

very little colour in her lips or in her light brown hair, and she had on a gray hat and travelling dress."

"Idina Bland!" Vanno exclaimed.

"You recognize the lady from my description?"

"Yes. What you say about her eyes is unmistakable. She's a distant cousin of ours — on our mother's side: Irish, from the north of Ireland; but she has lived a good deal in America with my mother's brother and sister. She has no nearer relatives than ourselves, and for three winters she was in Rome — oh, long after you went away. I thought she was in America now. I wonder —— " He broke off abruptly, and his face was troubled. "What questions did she ask you?" he went on. "Were they about — my brother?"

"Yes. She wished to know if I could tell her just when he was expected with his bride, and what would be their address when they arrived. I had the impression from something she said that she had heard about me from you."

"I don't remember," said Vanno. "I may have mentioned to her that we had a friend, a curé near Monte Carlo. She has a singularly good memory. She never forgets — or forgives," he added, half under his breath. "When did she come here?"

"The day before yesterday it was, Principino."

"Did she say whether she was staying in the neighbourhood?"

"No, she said nothing about herself, except that she had known your family well for years."

"And about Angelo — what?"

"Nothing, except the questions. She wanted me to tell her whether I had ever met or heard anything of his bride."

"I suppose you didn't give her much satisfaction?"

"Not much, my Principino. I could not, if I would. But I did say that I believed they were expected in ten days or a fortnight. I hope I was not indiscreet?"

"Not at all. Only — but it doesn't matter."

"Then, if it doesn't matter, let us turn to a subject nearer our hearts. The favour you wished to ask? Which you may consider granted."

After all, it was not quite as easy to explain as Vanno had thought, in his moments of exaltation on the mountain. But he was still determined to carry out his plan.

"You know, Father, when I was a little boy I used to talk with you about what I should do when I grew up, and how I should never fall in love with any girl, no matter how beautiful, unless she had eyes like my favourite stars? How you used to laugh about those 'eyes like stars!' Yesterday I saw a girl in a train at Marseilles. I got into the train, meaning to follow her, no matter how far. It was not like me to do that."

"Pardon me. I think it was," chuckled the curé. "You would always act on impulse, you man of fire — and ice."

"Well, she got off at Monte Carlo, where I myself wanted to stop. I thought that was great luck, at first. I turned over in my mind ways of making

her acquaintance. I believed it would be hard to do, but I meant to do it. Now, I'm not sure — not sure of anything about her. I'm not even sure whether I want to know her or not. The favour I have to ask is, that you help me to judge — and help her, if you have to judge harshly."

"I?"

"Yes, you, Father. If she needs help, I'm not the one to help her. But you could do it." And Vanno plunged deeper into explanations, warming with his story and forgetting his first shy stiffness.

As he talked, the curé's gaze dwelt on him affectionately, appreciatively. He admired the clear look and its fire of noble purity, not often seen, he feared, on the face of a young man brought up to believe the world at his feet. He admired the dark eyes, profound as the African nights they had loved. He noted the rich brown of the swarthy young face, clear as the profile on old Roman coins, and thought, as he had thought before, that Murillo would have liked to paint that colouring. He approved his Prince's way of speaking, when he lost self-consciousness and his gestures became free and winged. "How his mother would have loved him as he is now, if she had lived," the priest thought, remembering the warm-hearted Irish-American girl, whose impulses had been held down by the sombre asceticism of her husband, which increased with years. No wonder Prince Vanno was his father's favourite! Angelo had written that the duke disapproved his marriage, but that Vanno when he had

met the bride would "somehow make it all come right." It would be a terrible thing if this younger son should fall in love with the wrong woman; but it was too early yet to begin preachings and warnings. The curé's kind heart gave him great tact.

"I am to go downstairs and look at this lady, then?" he said.

"Downstairs?"

"Only my expression for going down *there*. I always say that I live upstairs, here at Roquebrune. And I like the upstairs life best."

"Well, you must come down and dine with me, anyhow. Then you will see her, and tell me what you think."

The cure broke into a laugh like a boy's. "Me dine at your Hôtel de Paris, my son? That is a funny thought. You're inconsistent. If you think it unsuitable for a lady alone, what about me, a poor country priest from the mountains?"

"You wouldn't be alone. And you're a man. Besides, it's a good object. When you've seen her, you must make acquaintance with her somehow. *I* won't do it. Not while I doubt her."

"Hm! My Principino, you don't know what you are asking me. I am a priest."

"That's why I ask you. She's — I'll tell you, Father, if she goes on winning money, you can write to beg for your poor. Then, if she's charitable, she'll give, and come up to see your church."

"And you think the rest is simple! Well, for your sake I will do what I can."

"Will you dine with me to-night?"

"Impossible. I cannot leave the village for so much as an hour for the present. I am shepherd of a mountain flock, remember, and my first duty is to them. At any moment I may have a summons to one who is dying. A black sheep he has been perhaps, but all the more should he be washed white at the last. And I must hold myself ready to give him the extreme unction when I am sent for, if it be now or not till next week."

Vanno had set his heart upon his plan, and could hardly bear to have it indefinitely postponed; but he had learned through old experience that his good friend was not one to be persuaded from duty.

"You'll let me know the moment you're free, in any case," he urged.

"That very moment. But, meanwhile, something may happen that will help you to judge the lady for yourself — something definite."

"I should have judged her already, if it weren't for her eyes," Vanno said, with a sigh. "They have a look as if she'd just seen heaven! I can hardly tell you how, but they are different from all other women's eyes. They send out a ray of light, like an arrow to your heart."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the priest.

"Don't laugh, Father. It's true, or I wouldn't have felt about her as I did from the first moment we looked at each other. She's beautiful, but I assure you it wasn't her beauty that made me follow her. It was something more mysterious than

that. I swear to you, it was as if her eyes said to me, 'Why, here you are at last, you whom I've known since the beginning of things. I am the one you've waited for all your life.'"

"All your life! Twenty-seven years, is it not?"

"Twenty-nine this month, Father. I'm not a boy, and I've cared very much only for one woman. I wasn't twenty then, and it's partly her fault that it's hard for me to believe in others."

"That's scarcely fair to the others. One woman isn't all womanhood."

"Ah, it's odd you should have said that, for the thought in my mind has been that this girl — this girl who has a child's face, I tell you, Father — seems somehow to represent womanhood, the woman of all time: the type, you know, that no man can resist. There's a kind of divine softness about her which calls to all there is in one of manhood — or romance. I can't describe it."

"You have made me understand," the curé answered quietly. "And you have made me — for your sake — want to find out as soon as I possibly can what truth is under all this sweetness."

XI

THE first question Mary asked on coming downstairs in the morning was, "At what hour does the Casino open?"

Ten o'clock, she was told.

It was not yet nine. A long time to wait!

Most people at the Paris breakfasted in their rooms, but never in her life had Mary eaten breakfast in her bedroom. She went to last night's table in the great glass window of the restaurant, and was hardly sure whether she felt relieved or disappointed not to see the young man with the Dante profile. She did not now think him in the least like Romeo.

From the window, to her surprise, she saw a crowd collecting in front of the Casino, whose doors were still closed.

"What is the matter?" she asked, almost alarmed, lest there had been an accident.

"It is the early ones waiting for the doors to open," her waiter explained. He brought her a poached egg on toast, but a superlative egg, poached and adorned according to the conception of a French *chef*. The air with which the silver cover was taken off and the dish shown to Mary made her feel there was nothing she could do to show her

appreciation, without disappointing the man, unless she bent down and kissed the egg passionately. Her smile seemed inadequate, and she ate with a worried fear of seeming ungrateful, especially as she was impelled to hurry, lest those people in front of the Casino should take all the places at the tables. She wanted to sit down to gamble, for the strenuous game she had played last night, with many stakes, would be impossible when stretching over people's heads.

By half-past nine she was in the crowd, all her money, with the exception of two hundred pounds she had put by, crushed into her big beaded hand-bag. She remembered how at Aberdeen the night she went to the theatre people stood like this, patiently waiting for the pit-door to open. What did she not remember about that, her first and only visit to a theatre?

At last the Casino doors yawned, as if they disliked waking up. The procession rolled toward them, like a determined and vigorous python. Mary was carried ahead with the rush. She had forgotten that she ought to have renewed her ticket, but fortunately she was not asked for it; and as she had come without a wrap, there was nothing to turn her aside from the rooms.

Once across the threshold of the big Salle Schmidt, the struggle began. It was not only the young and agile who raced each other to the tables. Men who looked as if they might have pulled one foot from the grave in order to reach

the Casino, hobbled wildly across the slippery floor. Fat elderly ladies waddled with indomitable speed, like women tied up in bags for an obstacle race; and an invalid gentleman, a famous player, with his attendant — the first to get in — was swept along in a small bath chair ahead of the crowd, an expression of fierce exhilaration on a gaunt face white as bleached bone. But the young and healthy gamblers had an advantage, especially those with long legs.

Only yesterday Mary would have let herself be passed by every one, rather than push into a place which somebody else wanted. Now, however, the gambler's fever was in her. Whatever happened, she must get a seat at the table where she had played last night. To do so was the most important thing on earth. Slender and tall and long-limbed, she ran like a young Diana; though not since she had become Sister Rose had she ever been undignified enough to run. Straight as an arrow she aimed for the table she wanted, and convulsively seized the back of the last unclaimed chair. It was grasped at the same instant by a young man of rather distinguished appearance, who would in other circumstances no doubt have yielded place to a woman, especially a young and pretty girl. But he too had the gambler's fever. He struggled with Mary for the chair, and would have secured it by superior strength if she had not dropped limply into it as he drew it out for himself.

"Well done!" muttered a woman already settled

in a neighbouring seat. "That's one of the Pretenders to the throne of Portugal."

Instead of being overawed, Mary found herself laughing in the joy of her triumph. "He can't have this throne, anyhow," she panted, out of breath.

Then she noticed that Lord Dauntrey was with her defeated rival. He had secured a chair, but getting up, gave it to the royal personage, who was his paying guest at the Villa Bella Vista. Lord Dauntrey had not seen, or had not recognized, Mary. He appeared to be more alive than he had been before, almost a different man. Though his features were stonily calm as the features of a mask, Mary felt that he was intensely excited, and completely absorbed in the game about to begin. He had a notebook over which his sleek brown head and Dom Ferdinand de Trevanna's short black curls were bent eagerly. It was evident that they had some plan of play which they were working out together.

It was just as thrilling, Mary thought, to be in the Casino by day as by night, and even more interesting now, because she knew how to play, instead of having to depend upon Madame d'Ambre. She had feared that her too solicitous friend might be lying in wait for her this morning, but she need have had no anxiety. Madeleine never appeared before noon. Perhaps she might have made a superhuman effort had there been reasonable hope of anything to gain. But Madame d'Ambre had learned to read faces: and Mary's had told her that for a time

there was nothing more to expect. She would be comfortably lazy while her money held out.

Mary's seat was near the spinner, one of the croupiers who had seen her sensational wins twelve hours ago. He smiled recognition. "Take zero again, and the neighbours," he mumbled cautiously. "I'll try and make you win."

Mary wanted to know what "neighbours" meant, and was told hastily that they were the numbers lying nearest to zero on the wheel.

"But I feel as if twenty-four would come," she objected.

"Very well, if Mademoiselle prefers twenty-four, I will see what I can do," replied the obliging croupier, like most of his fellow-spinners wishing to give the impression that he could control the ball.

Twenty-four did not respond to his efforts, but twenty-two was the first number spun, and as Mary had staked maximums on everything surrounding her number, she won heavily. Throughout the whole morning luck still favoured her. She lost sometimes, and her wins were not as sensational as those of last night, but they made people stare and talk, and added so many notes to the troublesome contents of her bag that, to the amusement of everybody, when the time came to go she stuffed gold and paper into the long gloves she had taken off while playing. Both gloves were full and bulged out in queer protuberances, like Christmas stockings. But this was not until nearly two o'clock, when Mary had grown so hungry that she could no

longer concentrate her thoughts upon the game. Meanwhile, different relays of croupiers and inspectors had come and gone, and the crowd round the table had changed. Very few remained of the players who had raced for chairs at the opening hour. Many had lost and taken themselves off, discouraged; others had a habit of darting from table to table "for luck"; some had won as much as they wanted to win, and departed quietly as a man goes home from his office. But among the few faithful ones were Lord Dauntrey and his royal friend, who was stared at a good deal, and evidently recognized. By this time Lord Dauntrey had noticed Mary, his attention being attracted to her by Dom Ferdinand, but as he had not been introduced to the girl in the train, he did not bow. The excitement had died from his face, leaving it gray as the ashes in a burnt-out fire, and his cheeks looked curiously loose on the bones, as if his muscles had fallen away underneath. Mary had not taken time to watch his game, but she saw that most of the silver and gold once neatly piled in front of the two players had disappeared, and she was afraid that they had lost a good deal. It seemed unnecessary and almost stupid to her that people should lose. She did not see why every one could not play as she did.

As she reluctantly rose to go away, driven by hunger, she had to pass close to Dom Ferdinand and Lord Dauntrey. There was no crowd round the chairs, as the morning throng had thinned for

déjeûner, and she heard Lord Dauntrey say: "I assure you, Monseigneur, it never went as badly as this on my roulette at home. You saw the records. But nobody can win at every séance. Don't be discouraged. I'm confident my system's unbreakable in the end."

It was half-past two when Mary began luncheon, and she had to finish in a hurry when Schuyler and Carleton called for her with the motor-car. She was sorry that she had promised to look at anything so irrelevant as an aeroplane, and felt nervously irritable because she could not at once go back to her game. She could almost hear the Casino calling her in a musical, golden voice: "I have something nice to give you. Why don't you come and take it?" But it was interesting to tell the two men about her luck of the morning. Each detail of the play was so fascinating to her that she would hardly have believed it possible for the story to bore any one else. She did not ask a single question about the remarkable hydro-aeroplane in which Carleton was to compete for an important prize next week; nor did she see the pitying smile the men exchanged while she entertained them with an exact account of how she had staked, what she had lost, and what she had won. "Poor child!" the look said. But neither man blamed the girl for her selfish absorption. Both understood the phase very well, and it was not long since Carleton had lived it down, thanks to some friendly brutality on Jim's part. As for Schuyler, though he never played at

the Casino, it was because he had played too often when a younger man, in America. Roulette and trente et quarante bored him now, though the great game in Wall Street still had power over his nerves, when he was in the thick of it. One reason that he avoided society at Monte Carlo and invited few people to his house was because the constant babble about the "Rooms" and the "tables" exhausted his vitality, making him feel, as he said, "like a field-mouse in a vacuum." Sometimes it had seemed to him that, if once again he heard any one say, "Oh, if only I had played on seventeen!" he would be forced to strike the offender, or rush away in self-defence.

Already Mary's eyes were losing the starlike clearness of their delight in all things novel or beautiful. They looked mistily introspective, as if they were studying some combination going on in the brain behind them; and when she could not talk about roulette she relapsed at once into absent-mindedness. But even her absorbed interest in the new pursuit was not proof against the hydro-aeroplane lurking in its hangar. It looked wonderful, yet she could not believe that it was able really to rise out of the water into air.

"I assure you it does, though, and it can run on land, too," said Carleton, eagerly. "Surely you must have read of Glenn Curtiss and his *Triad*, that made such a sensation in America? You can ask Jim. He saw my first successful experiment in the Hudson River six weeks ago."

"And one or two unsuccessful ones, too," laughed Jim. "But I really think, Miss Grant, that Carleton's got his pet dragon into pretty good training now, both as a land and water and air animal. I shouldn't wonder if we'd see something worth seeing next week at Nice — and it will be new on this coast, for there've been no hydro-aeroplanes tried here before."

"Next week?" echoed Mary. "Shan't I see anything now? I thought Mr. Carleton meant to go up in the air to-day."

"I hadn't thought of it, but I will if you like. That is, I'll try," said Carleton, modestly.

"I — oh, how I should love to go with you!" Mary exclaimed. "Can you carry people?"

"One passenger at a time, yes. You wouldn't really like it, would you?" he asked, flushing under the compliment of her trust in him, and admiring her pluck. "You don't mean that you'd go up with me?"

"I would if you'd take me." Her eyes were shining once more. "It would be — like all one's most marvellous dreams come true."

"You wouldn't be afraid?"

"Oh, no, not with you."

This was delicious flattery. Carleton promptly fell in love with Mary. Not to have done so would have been base ingratitude. No woman had ever paid him so great a compliment. He had thought her bewilderingly pretty before. Now she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

"You're the bravest girl on earth!" he exclaimed, ardently.

"Better leave her on earth, then," Schuyler said dryly. "We need brave women."

"There's no danger," Carleton protested with indignation. "Do you think I'd take her, if I thought there were?"

"Not if you thought there were. And I don't say there is. But Miss Grant's here without her people —— "

"I have no people," Mary cut him short. "Because you can't count aunts, can you, especially if they dislike you very much?"

Both men laughed.

"I must be your passenger," she said. "Now I've seen the hydro-aeroplane, I shan't eat or sleep till I've been up in it."

Carleton looked at his host. "You know, at worst she could only get a wetting if I kept over the sea," he said. "And very likely the *Flying Fish* will be cranky and refuse to rise."

"Here's hoping!" mumbled Schuyler. He did not define the exact nature of his hope, but offered no further objections.

Mary, seeing that she was to have her wish, was anxious to start at once, and almost surprised at herself for her own courage. But Carleton explained that she could not "make an ascent," as he laconically called it, dressed as she was. She must have a small, close fitting hat, and a veil to tie it firmly down, also a heavy wrap. He had an oilskin

coat which he could lend her, to put over it. Mary was not, however, to be turned from her desire by small obstacles. She had no very thick coat, but knew where to buy a lovely moleskin, very long, down to her feet. She could secure it and be ready in ten minutes if Mr. Schuyler would send her up the hill in his car. Permission was granted and she went spinning off with the chauffeur, both Schuyler and Carleton awaiting her return at the hangar, down on the beach by the harbour.

The "ten minutes" prolonged themselves to twenty, and while they were slowly passing, three men who had been on the Rock, writing their names in the visitors' book at the palace, came strolling down the long flight of paved steps to the harbour. One of these was Captain Hannaford. The other Englishman was also an officer, Major Norwood, who had known Hannaford long ago. And the third member of the party was the Maharajah of Indorwana, an extremely troublesome young Indian royalty who was "seeing Europe" under the guardianship of his reluctant bear leader, Norwood. Since the pair had landed at Marseilles, three weeks ago, Norwood had passed scarcely a peaceful moment by night or day. His authority over his charge was officially absolute; but in practise it could only be enforced by violence, which the unfortunate officer had not yet brought himself to exert. If he did not wish the Maharajah (who was twenty and had never before been out of his native land) to fall into some new mischief every hour, he was obliged

to find for the youth a ceaseless succession of amusements. Monte Carlo was to have been but the affair of a day. The Maharajah, however, had decided differently. He liked the place, and firmly refused to move. The two had now been staying for a week at the Metropole, and Major Norwood had telegraphed to the India Office in London for instructions.

The night before, he had been dragged by his charge to three dances at open-all-night restaurants, where professionals entertained the audience. The Maharajah had insisted on learning to dance, his instructress being an attractive Russian girl; then, as the fun grew furious, he had forgotten his eastern dignity, and pirouetted for a wager, with a valuable jar containing a palm. This jar he had promptly broken, and had not been conciliatory to the proprietor. At five o'clock he had driven his own car — bought at Marseilles — to Nice, full to overflowing with his late partners. There had been a slight accident, and to console the girls for their fright the Maharajah had divided all his ready money among them. Since then he had had one fight with a German, whom he had jostled, and who had called him a black man. Major Norwood had been obliged to use the most nerve-racking exertions to keep his princeling out of a French prison. Slightly subdued, the Maharajah had consented to call at the palace at Monaco, to walk through the beautiful gardens on the Rock with Hannaford, and to visit the Fish Museum; but there was a yearning for new

excitements in his dangerous dark eyes, and Norwood had been thankful to see Carleton the airman standing on the beach by his hangar. The two Americans were introduced to the Indian royalty, and Carleton, not too eagerly, had just begun to explain the features of his *Flying Fish*, when the big blue car brought Miss Grant back.

At sight of Mary in a newly bought motor-bonnet, the Maharajah's eyes lit up. He had seen her the night before at the Casino, and had started the applause after her first sensational win. Now he asked to be introduced, and Major Norwood's weary heart sank. Judging from the expression of the plump olive face, this was going to be another case of infatuation, and already there had been one on the ship, and one at Cannes, both of which had necessitated the most delicate diplomacy. The Maharajah was passionately fond of jewels, and had brought with him from home some of the finest in his collection, which he intended to wear in London. But on board ship he had given an emerald worth five hundred pounds to the pretty young wife of an old Indian judge, who could not resist accepting it; and at Cannes he had bestowed a diamond aigrette on a second-rate actress. Major Norwood had tried to get these valuables back, in vain; and now felt symptoms of heart failure whenever his charge looked at a beautiful woman.

The Maharajah had an extraordinarily winning manner, however, almost like that of a dignified child, and his way of speaking English was engaging.

Mary had never seen an East Indian before, and was much interested to meet one. She gave him her prettiest smiles and looks, while the other men stood round her, each secretly annoyed to see her treating a "black fellow" as if he were the equal of a European.

"I'm hanged if I'll stand on ceremony with the chap, if he is some kind of potentate," Carleton grumbled; and, interrupting the conversation, asked Mary if she were of the same mind about being his passenger for a flight.

"Of course!" she answered. But Carleton had not yet stepped into the hangar when Prince Vanno Della Robbia passed on foot, going to the palace on the Rock.

He had returned to his hotel after lunching with the curé, had dressed and, as he was told there might be a small revolution in progress at Monaco — something worth seeing — he had started out to walk.

The revolution of Monegasques demanding the vote seemed after all not to be taking place that day; but if Vanno missed the miniature warlike demonstration he had been promised, at least his walk was not uneventful. Noticing a group round Carleton's hangar on the beach, he drew nearer, and to his astonishment saw Mary in a long coat of moleskin, and a little red motor-bonnet, surrounded by five men, one of them the somewhat notorious Maharajah of Indorwana. Vanno retreated hastily, and went on toward the steps which led up to the Rock

of Monaco; but he had not gone far when a combination of sounds stopped him: the whirr of a propeller and the throb of an engine. Carleton was evidently on the point of trying his machine, the curious invention which could be used, it was said, on land as well as in air and on the water.

Vanno looked back, and saw a biplane on wheels, fitted with a kind of float. It was moving out of the hangar, down an inclined plane that bridged the beach as far as the water's edge. In the aviator's seat sat Dick, and behind him the red motor-bonnet was decorative as a flower.

She was going with Carleton! Vanno had hardly time to realize that he had seen her, before the hydro-aeroplane ran, rather than plunged, into the water. It ploughed deeply and almost painfully for the first moment, sending up a great spout of foam like an immense plume of spun glass; but as Carleton increased the speed daringly, his *Flying Fish* rose higher on the little waves, the float barely skimming the surface of the water. The aviator tilted the control, as if to watch the action, and suddenly, to the amazement of all the spectators, what had been an unusual looking double-decked motor-boat sprang out of the harbour into the air. It rose gracefully and gradually to a height of perhaps four hundred feet, flying as if it aimed straight for the far-distant pearl-cluster of Bordighera, on the Italian coast.

Vanno had an extraordinary sensation, as if his heart stopped beating, and as if at the same time an iron band across his chest stopped the expansion

of his lungs. It was such a sensation as a man might have in the moment of death, and it was so unlike anything he had ever felt before that, for a few seconds of physical agony, he asked himself dazedly what was the matter. Then, suddenly, he knew that he was afraid — afraid for the girl. And he hated Carleton for risking her life. He felt a savage longing to do the young airman some bodily injury as a punishment for what he, Vanno, was made to suffer.

The relief was so great when the *Flying Fish* dropped slowly down and settled again into the water that Vanno was slightly giddy with the rush of blood through his veins. He watched the hydro-aeroplane turn and head back for the mouth of Monaco harbour; and it seemed to him that he had lived through years in a few minutes, as one can have a lifetime's experience in one short dream. He sickened as he thought what would be his feelings now if the machine had fallen and turned over, too far off for any hope of rescue from land. If those "eyes like stars" had been closed until eternity, with no hope that he could ever learn the secret of the soul behind them, nothing the future might have to give could make up for the loss. It was only when the *Flying Fish* swam safely into the harbour that Vanno remembered his irritation at seeing Mary with all those men, the only woman among them. After what he had gone through since then, this annoyance seemed a ridiculously small thing; but no sooner was she on land again, received with acclamations from

her new friends and applause by the crowd which had quickly collected, than Vanno felt the same tingling anger.

The girl was making herself notorious! At this rate she would be talked of everywhere. Strangers would snapshot her as she passed. Her picture would be for sale on one of those Monte Carlo post-cards of celebrities which were newly taken every day; she would be in the local English illustrated newspaper. He walked off quickly, with his head down, so as to lose himself in the crowd and not be seen by Mary or her companions.

She was pale as a drowned girl when Carleton and Hannaford helped her out of the oilskin which had protected her new fur cloak; and never, perhaps, had she been so beautiful. There was something unearthly about her, as if she had seen a vision and the blinding light of it still shone white upon her face. As he touched her, Hannaford felt a thrill as of new life go through him. By his own wild recklessness he had spoilt his career and put himself, so he believed, beyond the pale of any woman's love. He had thought that he had trained himself not to care; but in that instant, while Mary, dazed by her vision, almost hung in his arms and Carleton's, he knew that he was as other men. He wondered why last night she had meant no more to him than a pretty new face at Monte Carlo, a rather amusing problem which would soon lose its abstruse charm. It was like tearing out a live nerve to feel that she could think of him only with disgust or maybe

horror. Yet he knew that, now he had seen her face with the wonderful light on it, he would have to try and win something from her, if only pity. The idea came to him that she and he, and these men with them, and Madeleine d'Ambre, and others who would gather round the beautiful and lucky player, were figures being woven into a web of tapestry together; that they were forced to group themselves as the weaver of the web decreed. He saw his own figure woven into an obscure and shadowy corner far from that of Mary, and, rebelling against the choice of the weaver, wished to tear the tapestry in pieces. But the next moment he was ready to smile at himself with the quiet, cynical smile which had become familiar to all those who knew him. "Nothing is tragic unless you think so," he said to himself. Yet he could not put out of his mind the fancy of the web with figure after figure being woven into it, against the background of sea and mountain. It was not unlike the idea which had come to Peter in a half-waking dream the night after Mary went away. And at the convent in the north of Scotland the same thought still came back to Peter, though no news had yet been received there from Monte Carlo.

"Were you afraid?" the Maharajah of Indorwana asked Mary, as the colour slowly flowed back to her face.

"No," she said, dreamily, "not afraid. But it was like dying and going to another world. When we were rushing through the water with the loud

noise of machinery in our ears, and the glassy screen of spray over our heads, I lost my breath. I couldn't think clearly; but I supposed that was all. I couldn't believe we should go up. But then came the spring, and we were in the air, bounding higher — it was like something imagined after death. And the rest was being in heaven, till we began to drop. Then, just for a few seconds, it felt as if my body were falling and leaving my soul poised up there in the sky. I shall never forget — never. And when the time does come to die, I don't believe I shall mind now, for I know it will be like that, with the wonder of it after the shrinking is over."

Hannaford looked at her closely as she spoke. He was continually thinking of death as a dark room, behind a shut door which he would perhaps choose to open. He felt that he would like to talk to her some day about what she really expected to find on the other side of the door.

Nothing else was quite real to him in the scene, when everybody pressed round Carleton, congratulating him on his machine and the exploit of which the airman seemed to think little. It was not real when Schuyler invited Hannaford and his two companions to crowd into the big car, and be spun up the hill to Monte Carlo. He remembered the illumined look on Mary's face (though it was gone now) and the faint ray of hope it had sent into that secret place where his real self lived wearily.

XII

If Mary had died and waked up in another world, it could hardly have been more of a contrast to her old existence than the new life at Monte Carlo to the life at St. Ursula's-of-the-Lake.

And the Mary at Monte Carlo was a different person from the Mary at the Scotch convent. She had a new set of thoughts and feelings of which she would not have believed herself capable in Scotland. She would have been surprised and shocked at them in another, a few weeks ago. Now she was not shocked or surprised at them even in herself. They seemed natural and familiar. She was at home with them all, and with her new self, not even realizing that it was a new self. And she grew more beautiful, like a flower taken from a dark northern corner of the garden and planted in a sheltered, sunny spot.

She no longer thought of turning her back upon Monte Carlo in a few days, and journeying on to Florence. She stayed, without making definite plans; but she did not write to the convent. She knew that Reverend Mother would not like her to be here, gambling, and it would be too difficult to explain. There was no use in trying, and she could not bear the thought of having to read a re-

proachful letter, when she was so happy and every one was being so nice to her. It was different about her Aunt Sara. She knew, if she did not arrive in Florence, Mrs. Home-Davis's friend would write and say that she had never appeared. Then perhaps her aunt would follow to see what had become of her. Rather than run the risk of this dreadful thing happening, Mary telegraphed to Cromwell Road; "Have changed my mind. Staying on the Riviera. Am well and safe; will write when decide to leave." And she put no address. After sending off this message she felt relieved for a few days, as if she were secure from danger; but sometimes she waked in the night to worry lest Aunt Sara knew any one on the Riviera who might be instructed to look up a stray niece. Then she would comfort herself by reflecting that Mrs. Home-Davis was not at all the sort of woman to know people at Monte Carlo. She was too dull and uninteresting.

And just now most things seemed dull and uninteresting to Mary which were not connected with gambling.

Her winnings were not in themselves out of the common, for every season at Monte Carlo there are at least six or seven players who win great sums, whose gains are talked about and watched at the tables, and who go away with from ten to fifty thousand pounds. But it was the combination of personality with great and persistent good luck which made Mary Grant remarkable, and her behaviour was puzzling and piquantly mysterious to

those who had no clue to her past. Everybody talked about her: the croupiers who spun her numbers or put on her stakes, and received her generous tips: the shopkeepers with whom she spent the money she won, buying expensive hats and furs, dresses and jewellery: clerks at the bank where she deposited her winnings: people of all sorts who frequented the Casino, and even those who were there seldom but heard what was going on through acquaintances at the many luncheon parties and "At Homes" which make up the round of life at Monte Carlo. And Mary knew that she was stared at and talked about, and liked it as a child likes to be looked at when walking out with a splendid new doll. She had no idea that any one could say unkind things of her, or that there was anything in her conduct to call for harsh comments. It was so delightful to be winning every day at roulette, and spending the easily gained money in amusing ways, that Mary thought every one who came near her must be almost as much pleased with her luck as she was — all but the one man who had snubbed her, the man whose name she had not heard, but who, she had been told by her devoted waiter, was a Roman prince. He disapproved of or disliked her, she did not know which, or why; and because he kept the table near hers in the restaurant his look, which was sometimes like a vehement reproach, always depressed her, bringing a cold sense of failure where all might have been joy. The thought of this stranger's disapproval was the fly in her amber; and the idea floated through

her mind sometimes that they might have known each other in a forgotten state of existence. When their eyes met, it was as if there were a common memory between them, something that had happened long ago, drawing them together.

Days passed, and Vanno's project which concerned Mary and the curé was still in abeyance, for the priest was not free yet to leave Roquebrune. The man whose death was daily expected had not died, and the curé spent as much time with him as could be spared from other duties. But Vanno Della Robbia was not the only one who sought the services of a friend in order to "help" Mary.

One afternoon at the end of the Nice aviation week Dick Carleton ran up three flights of marble stairs in a huge square house on the left or seaward side of the Boulevard d'Italie at Monte Carlo. It was a building given up to flats, and the corridors were almost depressingly clean and cold looking, with their white floors and stairways of crude, cheap marble, and their white walls glittering with the washable paint called "Ripolin." On each étage were two white doors with openwork panels of iron over glass, which in most cases showed curtains on the other side. The door before which Carleton stopped on the third floor had a semi-transparent rose-coloured curtain; and just above the bell push was neatly tacked a visiting card with the name "Reverend George Winter" engraved upon it.

Carleton had never met the new incumbent of St. Cyprian's, but the chaplain had lately married

an American girl, Dick's cousin. This was the first time that Carleton had found a chance to call, although he had been staying with Schuyler for over a fortnight. He felt rather guilty and doubtful of his reception, as a neat little Monegasque maid told him that Madame was *chez elle*. But he need not have been anxious. As the maid announced his name with a pronunciation all her own, a pretty girl sprang up from a chintz-covered window seat, in a drawing-room which in an instant took Carleton across the sea to his native land.

The girl had been sitting on one foot, and as she jumped up quickly she stumbled a little, laughing.

"Oh, Dick, you nice thing!" she exclaimed. "I *am* glad to see you. But my foot's asleep. Goodness, what needles and pins!"

She stamped about on the polished floor, with two small feet in silk stockings and high-heeled, gold-buckled slippers, a novel tucked under her arm, and one hand clasping her cousin's.

"Well," he said, "if any creature could be less like a parson's wife than you, madam, I'd like to see it."

"I know I'm the exact opposite of what one ought to be," she laughed, "and it almost makes me feel not legally married. But don't — don't, please, if you love me, use that awful word 'parson' again. I can't stand it. Don't you think it sounds just like the crackle of cold, overdone toast?"

"Can't say I ever thought about it," said Carleton.

"Well, I have, constantly. It was a long time before I could make up my mind to say 'yes' to St. George, on account of that word."

"Is St. George his name?" Dick asked.

"It's my name for him. The 'saint' part's my private property. But he is a saint, if ever there was one: and a good thing too, as he's got a dragon on the hearth to tame; but a *little* inconvenient sometimes for the poor dragon. Oh, Dick, you've no idea how good and pure-minded and absolutely Alpine and on the heights he is. Often I expect to pick edelweiss in his back hair."

Carlton gave one of his sudden, boyish laughs. "That sounds like you. How did you come to marry such a chap?"

"I was so horribly afraid some other girl would get him, if I left him lying about. But do let's sit down. My foot's wide awake again now."

They sat on the cushioned window seat and smiled into each other's eyes.

"How brown you are!" she exclaimed.

"How pretty you are!" he retorted.

And it was true. She was very pretty, a girlish creature, thin and eager looking, with large tobacco-brown eyes full of a humorous, observant interest in everything. Her skin was dark and smooth as satin. Even her long throat and nervous hands, and the slim, lace-covered arms, were of the same satin-textured duskiness as the heart-shaped face, with its laughing red mouth. Her cheekbones were rather high and touched with colour, as if a geranium

petal had been rubbed across them, just under the brown shadows beneath the eyes. Her chin was small and pointed, her forehead low and broad, and this, with the slight prominence of the cheekbones and the narrowing of the chin, gave that heartlike shape to her face which added piquancy and made it singularly endearing.

She was very tall and graceful, with pretty ways of using her hands, and looking from under her lashes with her head on one side, which showed that she had been a spoiled and petted child.

"Yes, I'm quite pretty," she agreed gayly, "and I have on a pretty dress, which is part of my trousseau, and I hope it will last a long time. But the thing I am principally interested in just now is our flat. Call this a 'living-room' at once, or I shall feel homesick and burst into tears. The question is, do you think *it* is pretty?"

"Awfully pretty; looks like you somehow," answered Dick, gazing around appreciatively. "Jolly chintz with roses on it, and your rugs are ripping. Everything goes so well with everything else."

"It ought to. I have taken enough trouble over it all, introducing wedding presents to each other and trying to make them congenial. I have no boudoir, so I can't boude. But St. George has a study with books up to the ceiling, and lots still on the floor, because we are not settled yet, though we arrived — strangers in a strange land — in November. I expect you'll recognize some of the things here, because old colonial furniture doesn't

grow on blackberry bushes in this climate, and I brought over everything Grandma Carleton left me: that desk, and cabinet and mirror, and those three near-Chippendale chairs. Wouldn't the poor darling make discords on her golden harp, or moult important feathers out of her wings, if she could see her parlour furniture in a room at Monte Carlo?"

"Nice way for a par — I mean a chaplain's wife to talk," said Dick.

"I've been *so* prim for three whole months," Rose Winter excused herself, "except, of course, when I'm alone with St. George."

"Ever since you were married. Poor kid! But don't you have to be prim with him?"

"Good gracious, no! That would be death. I arranged with him the day I definitely said yes, and again on our wedding eve, so as to have *no* misunderstanding, that I might keep all my pet slang, and even use *language* if I felt it really necessary; otherwise he would certainly have been the 'Winter of my discontent.'"

"What do you call language?" Dick wanted to know.

"Oh, well, I have invented some and submitted it for St. George's — if not approval — tolerance. 'Carnation' for instance, and 'split my infinitives,' are the most useful, and entirely inoffensive, when one's excited. Also I may have a cigarette with him after dinner, if I like, when we're alone. Only I haven't wanted it yet, for we have so much to say, it won't stay lighted. But now tell me about your-

self. Of course we knew you'd come. It was in a paper here, that tells us all the news about everybody, in English: who's who (but who isn't who nowadays who can play bridge?), also what entertainments Who gives to Whom."

"Sounds complicated," said Dick.

"So it is, complicated with luncheon parties and tea parties, and knowing whether to invite So and So with Thing-um-bob, or whether they've quarrelled over bridge or something, and don't speak. It's most intricate. But I've kept track of you — as much as one *can* keep track of an airman. We knew how busy you'd be, so we didn't expect you to call. And St. George didn't like to go and worry you at Stellamare, as he isn't acquainted with Mr. Schuyler."

"I believe Schuyler sends subscriptions to the church at Monte Carlo and at Mentone, and to the Catholic priest at Roquebrune as well, and thinks he's quit of religious duties," said Carleton. "Yet he's an awfully good fellow — gives a lot away in charities, all around here. He is great chums with some of the peasants. It's quite an experience to take a walk with him: He says how-de-do to the quaintest creatures. But he can't be bothered with society. Vows most of the people who come back here every winter to the villas and hotels are like a lot of goldfish going round and round in a glass globe."

"I hope *we* shan't get like that," said Rose. "At present, I am quite amusing myself. And it seems

to me there are many different kinds of life here. You have only to take your choice, just as you do in other places, only here it's curiously concentrated and concrete."

"Now, I ask you, is it the right spirit, to talk of 'amusing yourself' in taking up your new parochial duties?" Carleton teased her.

"Perhaps one does things better if it amuses one to do them," she argued. "And really I'm a success as shepherd's assistant, or sheep-dog-in-training. I don't go barking and biting at the poor sheep's heels (*have* sheep heels?), for the sheep here are pampered and sensitive, and their feelings have to be considered, or they jump over the fence and go frisking away. Besides, I always think it must give dogs such headaches to bark as they do! Instead, I make myself agreeable and do pretty parlour tricks, which would be far beneath St. George's dignity; and, anyhow, *he* couldn't do tricks to save his life. His place is on the mountain tops, so I sit in the valley below, and give the weakest sheep tea and smile at them or weep with them, whichever they like better."

The cousins laughed, both looking very young and happy, and pleased with themselves and each other. They were almost exactly of the same age, twenty-three, and as children had played together in the pleasant old Kentucky town which had given them both their soft, winning drawl. But Dick's people had moved North, and hers had stayed in the South, until three years ago, when Rose and her

father had started off on a tour of Europe. In England she met George Winter, and did the one thing of all others which she would have vowed never to do: she fell in love with a clergyman. They had been married three months ago in Louisville, had then visited his parents in Devonshire; and because Winter had not fully recovered tone since an attack of influenza, he had accepted a chaplaincy in the south of France. Rose Fitzgerald and Dick Carleton, children of sisters, had put a marker in the book of their old friendship, and were able to open it at the page where they had left off years ago. She was not in the least hurt because he had let more than a fortnight go by before calling, for she knew that he had come for the aviation, and must have had head and hands full. She was not aware that he found time to see a good deal of another young woman who had no claim of old friendship; but even if she had known, she would have understood and forgiven almost as one man understands and forgives another. For quaintly feminine as she was, Rose often said, and felt, that "before a woman can be a true lady she must be a gentleman." And, being a gentleman, she can learn to be a "good fellow" — an invaluable accomplishment for a woman.

"I saw you fly, you know," she said, when they had finished laughing. "I went to Nice on purpose — that is, nearly on purpose. I combined it with buying a dress, a perfectly sweet Paris dress, which I shall try to wear with a slight English accent, so as

not to be too smart for a well-regulated sheep-dog. Every one declared the honours of the aviation week were yours, with that wonderful *Flying Fish*. I wouldn't have believed a machine made by man could do such weird things, if I hadn't heard all about the Glenn Curtiss experiments and successes with the *Triad* at home. I was proud of you. Except that man who tested the Della Robbia parachute, you were quite the most distinguished thing in the air, although it was really crowded — all sorts of quaint creatures giving you their airwash. I want to have a Skye terrier now, and name him after you. St. George was going to give me a dachshund, but they do look so bored to tears, I think it would depress me having one about. And, besides, I draw the line at an animal which can't know whether its ancestors were lizards or dogs."

"Look here, Rosie," Dick began when she paused, with an introspective look which told her that he had not heard a word she said, "there's something I want you to do for me."

"It won't be the first time," she replied pertly. "I 'spect I'll like to do it. But if it's anything important, better begin now, for some of my own specially collected sheep will be drifting in to tea."

"Sheep at tea! A new subject for an artist," mumbled Carleton.

"My special ones are so shorn it would be scarcely decent to paint them, and a few are already quite black. But they all like tea — from my hands. It knits them together in a nice soft woolly way.

And St. George will probably stroll in with the Alpine glow of a sermon-in-the-making still lighting up his eyes. And he will be introduced to you and drop crumbs on my lovely Persian rug, and ask to have the gramophone started. He loves it. Often I think our friends must go away and complain of being gramophoned to death by a wild clergyman. So out with what you have to ask me, my dear man, or the enemy will be upon us."

Carleton got up, with his hands in his pockets, and stared out of the window which looked down from a seemingly great height over the turquoise sea. He could see a train from Italy tearing along a curve of the green and golden coast, like a dark knight charging full tilt toward the foe, a white plume swept back from his helmet. Suddenly the smooth blue surface of the sea was broken by the rush of a motor-boat practising for a forthcoming race, a mere buzzing feather of foam, with a sound like the beating of an excited heart, heard after taking some drug to exaggerate the pulsation. Yet Carleton was hardly conscious of what he saw or heard. He was thinking how best to ask Rose Winter to make Miss Grant's acquaintance. Several ways occurred to him, but at last he blurted out something quite different from what he had planned.

"There's a girl — a lady — I — I want to get your opinion about," he stammered, turning red, because he knew that Rose was looking at him with a dangerously innocent expression in her eyes.

"That is, I should like to know how you'd classify her," he finished.

Rose answered lightly. "There are just three sorts of women, Boy — counting girls: Perfect Dears, Poor Dears, and Persons. Men of course are still easier to classify, because there are only two kinds of them — nice and horrid. But under which of the three heads would you yourself put your friend? I suppose you think she's a Perfect Dear, or you wouldn't have to go and look out of the window while you lead up to asking if I'll make her acquaintance."

"No," said Dick. "I'm afraid she's rather more like a Poor Dear. That's why I want you to help her."

"Oh, you want me to help her? You're *quite* sure she isn't a Person?"

"I should think not, indeed!" Dick broke out indignantly. "She's a lady, whatever else she may be."

"It sounds like a Deserving Case. Oh, dear, I do *hope* she isn't a deserving case? I've had so many thrust under my nose in the last seven weeks, and I'm sorry to say the undeserving ones are usually more interesting. They're all undeserving ones who're coming to tea."

"If you'd call on her, you could see for yourself whether you thought she was deserving or not."

"That's the way I'm to help her — by calling? I thought perhaps I was to get her out of pawn, or something, by buying her jewellery. But I had to

tell you, if *that* was what you wanted, I couldn't do much, for all my pocket money is exhausted, owing to so many people coming and crying tears as large as eggs all over the living-room — quite strange people I've never seen before. You can't conceive, Dick, the cataracts of tears that have poured over this rug you admire so much."

"I don't understand," said Carleton, looking blank. "Unless you want to switch me off the subject of —— "

"The Poor Dear? No, indeed. But you couldn't be expected to understand, not being a chaplain's wife at Monte Carlo. You see, they hear we're kind, so they call, and then begin to cry and offer me pawn tickets as security."

"Who are 'they'?"

"Oh, poor creatures — seldom poor dears — who've *lost*, you know. As I suppose your one has?"

"On the contrary," said Dick, almost sharply. "She's won tremendous sums. She simply can't lose — anything except her head."

"Not her heart? But without joking, if she isn't a 'case,' why do you want me to —— "

"Because I think she ought to have some one to look after her, some one who knows the ropes. Honestly, Rose, I'd be awfully obliged if you'd call."

"I will of course," Rose answered. "Have I got to be agreeable to any mothers or aunts she may have lurking in the background?"

"That's the trouble. She hasn't got a soul."

"Oh! And she is quite young?"

"Sometimes she looks a baby. Sometimes I think she's a little older."

"Then she probably is. Where's she staying?"

"At the Hôtel de Paris."

"My gracious! *Alone* at a big Monte Carlo hotel! A young girl! No wonder you glare out of the window while you ask me to call on her, and stick your hands deep in your pockets. People won't allow me for an instant to forget I'm a clergyman's wife. *Et tu Brute!*"

"I told you she was a lady." Dick turned rather white. "She doesn't know what she's doing. I'm sure she doesn't. She — even Schuyler, who reads most people at sight like A B C, can't make her out. She's a mystery."

"Forgive me," said Rose. "I was half in fun. I wouldn't hurt your *Flying-Fish* feelings for anything on earth or in air. Is she pretty, and is she American — or what?"

"She's perfectly beautiful, and she's English, I think."

"Hasn't she told you?"

"No. She says nothing about herself — I mean about herself before she came here."

"What's past is past. Dark or fair? — not her past, but her complexion?"

"Fair."

"*Not* one of those pink and white girls picked out in blue and gold, one sees about so much?"

"As different from them as moonlight from footlights. If ever you went into the Casino, you

couldn't have helped having her pointed out to you. She's always there, and she's so awfully pretty and dresses so — so richly, and wins such a lot that everybody stares and talks. She's the sensation of the place."

"But I never do go into the Casino, of course — that is, not into the Rooms. I go to the Thursday Classical Concerts, and even that St. George shakes his head over, as it's inside the fatal door. You see he's here to preach against gambling, among other things."

"I don't suppose the gamblers go to hear his sermons?"

"Oh, yes, they do. A good many of them feel that if they attend church and put money in the plate, and don't play on Sunday, the rest's all right. They can keep up a bowing acquaintance with religion that way, anyhow. But I'll go and call on your mystery. What's her name?"

"Miss Grant."

Rose's face changed. "Oh, is it *that* girl? I *am* glad! Virtue is its own reward. I shall love to to have an excuse to make her acquaintance."

Dick, who had faced round in the window but was still standing, came and sat down by his cousin.

"What do you know about her?" he asked.

"I'll tell you. It's a sort of story," she answered thoughtfully; "a story about a picture."

XIII

"You know the two beggars who stand by the bridge, just over the Monegasque frontier as you go toward Cabbé Roquebrune and Mentone?" Rose said, her eyes no longer on Carleton, but fixed upon something she alone could see. "Of course you know they keep off Monaco territory by half an inch or so, because begging is forbidden in the principality. There's an old white-haired man with rather a sinister face. I'm not sure if he's deformed in any way,or if he just produces on the mind an odd effect of some obscure deformity. He's one of the beggars; and the other's a little humpbacked elf of a creature, hardly human to look at, with his big head and ragged red eyelids; but he's always smiling and gay, bowing and beckoning. It's his *metier* to be merry, just as it's the other's pose to be overwhelmed with gloom."

"I know them both," said Dick. "I can't resist throwing the little humpback a fifty-centime piece now and then, from Jim's automobile, though Jim scolds me for it in a superior way — the way people have who take a firm moral stand against beggars. Jim's on the firm moral stand about a lot of things. He's a strong man, body and soul and mind, but I have a whole brood of pet weaknesses running about

that I hate to destroy. The other day when I was going over to Nice to try my luck with the *Flying Fish* for the first time, I'm ashamed to say I chucked that little red-eyed, grinning imp five francs for luck — my luck, not his?"

"It's a wonder you didn't get out and rub his hump, as a lot of gamblers do. They say he's quite a rich man, owing to that sort of silly susperstition, but I can't resist him, either. And I feel it quite a feather in my cap of fascination that I've made the other one — the gloomy beggar — smile, though I've never given him a sou. He has quite a sense of humour, when you get to know him — and when he's realized that he can't fool you. I often walk to the bridge and back, just for a chat with the two beggars, instead of everlastingly promenading up and down the Terrace, bowing to every one I know, when I want exercise. I thought I was the only person original enough or brave enough or depraved enough to visit the beggars socially; but the other morning I was on my way to pay them a call, when I saw that somebody else was ahead of me. It was quite a picture. You remember the blazing hot day we had last week?"

"Wednesday. The best we had at Nice. Not a breath of wind. The day Rongier tried the Della Robbia parachute the second time and made his sensational descent."

"Well, then it was Wednesday. It was like June. The beggars were having a lovely time. They'd taken off their comfortable winter overcoats with

those wing-like, three-leaved capes which they've been wearing ever since the beginning of December, and had gone back to summer things: nice, shady, flapping felt hats and cool clothes; and they were having one of their pleasant little feasts which I used quite to envy them when we first came, while the weather was still very warm. A rough table in the road, close to the stone wall, with thick chunks of black bread, and cheese and salad, and chesnuts instead of the figs they had in autumn, all spread out on a paper tablecloth. They had wine of the country, too, with slices of lemon in it; and when I came along a girl was there, peeling a big chestnut for herself which the beggars had given her. She'd taken off her gloves and laid them on the table, with a perfectly gorgeous gold chain bag blazing with jewels, and a gold vanity box to keep the gloves down. Just imagine! On the beggars table! And they didn't seem to grudge her such splendid possessions one tiny bit. They were grinning at her in the most friendly way, as if they loved her to have pretty things and be rich and beautifully dressed. You could see by their air that they considered themselves chivalrous knights of the road being gallant to a lovely lady. That gloomy old wretch was grinning at least an inch wider for her than he ever did for me; and she was smiling, with heaven knows how many dimples flashing as brilliantly as her rings, while she peeled the chestnut."

"Yes, that must have been Miss Grant!" ex-

claimed Dick, delightedly. "I never saw such dimples as she's got."

"Or else you've forgotten the others. Well, I walked slowly so as not to break up the picture. She had on a thin veil, so I thought maybe she wouldn't be as pretty or young without it, but it was like a pearly mist with the sun shining on it, and it gave her that kind of mysterious, magic beauty of things half seen which stirs up all the romance in you."

"Don't I know?" Dick muttered. "But she's always got that, with or without a veil. It's a peculiar quality of her features or her expression — I don't know which — that can't be described exactly, any more than the lights on the clouds can, that I see sometimes when I've got up a few hundred feet high in the sunrise. I wouldn't have said all this about her if you hadn't begun. But anybody must feel it."

"I believe the beggars did, without knowing it. I did — even I, a woman. I felt I must see if she'd be as pretty when she lifted her veil to eat the chestnut, so I stopped not far off, on the Monaco end of the bridge, and pretended to tie up my shoestring. I thought I'd never seen a face like hers — not at all modern, somehow. Who is it says romance is the quality of *strangeness* in beauty? Hers has that. It seemed to me when she got her veil up that she was more wonderful, not belonging to any century in particular, but to all time, as if thousands of lovely ancestresses had given her something of themselves as a talisman."

"Rose, what a darling you are!" Dick said, seizing her hands and squeezing them hard.

"Oh," she laughed, wincing a little. "You couldn't do that to *her* with all her rings. I was just trying to *draw* you! Now I've found out all I want to know. You're dreadfully, frightfully in love with Miss Grant."

"Am I?" he asked. "Perhaps. I'm not sure. Only I see that there's something rare about her, and she's too precious to be living as she does, surrounded by a weird gang who all want to get something out of her, or else to give her something she oughtn't to take. Like that Indian chap, the Maharajah of Indorwana — confound the little beast! He's tried to make her take a diamond star and a rope of pearls."

"I suppose she needn't, unless she wants to."

"Oh, I don't know, she's so good-natured, and somehow childlike. She had both the things on at the Casino last night; said he insisted on lending them to her, for luck, and she didn't like refusing them, as he almost cried. And then there's that jeweller man from Paris — has a shop in the Galerie Charles Trois. She strolled into his place to buy the gold bag you saw on the beggars' table and he went wild about her. Cheek of him! Sent her a bracelet she had to send back. How dare a fellow like that have the impudence to fall in love with a girl like her?"

"Cats may look at kings, and I suppose kings embrace queens, don't they? You needn't be so mad.

You come from a democratic country, and Grandma Carleton's father was a grocer."

"He was a super-grocer. And, anyhow, Americans are different."

"Some of them fly high nowadays, eh, Mr. Air-pirate?"

Dick laughed. "You haven't told me yet what happened next at the beggars' feast, and how you found out who *she* was."

"Nothing happened to any one except me. They went on feasting and gave her some more chestnuts. I don't know what she'd given them! But she'd probably rubbed the lucky hump and paid for it. I was dying to go up and speak to my pals, and perhaps be introduced to the girl, but I hadn't got quite cheek enough, and they seemed to be having such a good time, it was a shame to interrupt. The elf was talking, with explosive sort of gestures in between mouthfuls, evidently telling something very interesting. And you know, I always pretend to myself in a kind of fairy story that he's really a person of immense, mysterious influence, a weird power behind the throne, starting or stopping revolutions. Of course it's nonsense — all founded on my seeing him with one of the new revolutionary newspapers in his hand — the ones they allow nowadays to be sold in the principality, against the Prince, and the Casino, and everything. But if I were to write a sensational story of Monte Carlo, that little red-eyed dwarf at the bridge should be the hero. And just as I was thinking about all that, and tying

my second shoe, along came a taxi with poor Captain Hannaford in it. He'd been into Italy to see Madame Berenger, the actress, at her villa, which he would like to buy, and was coming back to lunch; so he made the chauffeur pull up while he asked if he could drive me home? I said yes, because I saw him lift his hat to that girl, and I hoped he could tell me something about her."

"What did he tell you?"

"Not so very much. He didn't seem to want to talk about her, I thought. That didn't surprise me, because he has an idea that women feel disgust for him and can't bear to look at him if they can help it — all but me, for I've convinced him that I'm really his friend. He only said that her name was Miss Grant, and that she was very lucky at the Casino. And in about three minutes we were at the door of this house."

"Well, I'm mighty glad you're interested in her, and that you're willing to call."

"Willing? I'm charmed. I'll go to-morrow."

"You — you couldn't go to-day, I suppose?"

"Silly boy, it's too late. Here's tea; and here's St. George; and here will be some of the flock presently, who generally appear on the stroke of half-past four."

In another moment Carleton was shaking the hand of a slender, pale man with auburn hair worn rather long, a sensitive mouth, delicate nostrils, and beautiful, bright, hazel eyes which shone with a spiritual, unworldly enthusiasm. He looked like one

who would cheerfully have been a martyr to his faith had he lived a few centuries earlier. And Dick thought his cousin's simile of the high Alps not too far fetched, after all. But there was a warm light in the beautiful eyes as they turned upon Rose; and something in the man's smile hinted that he did not lack a sense of humour, except when too absent-minded to bring it into play. Dick felt happy about Rose, and happier about Miss Grant, because Rose would go and see her.

XIV

Life was not running on oiled wheels at the Villa Bella Vista.

A spirit of discontent, a feeling that they had been lured to the house under false pretences, grew among Lady Dauntrey's visitors and was expressed stealthily, a word here, a word there, and sullen looks behind the backs of host and hostess. Even on the first day disappointment began to wriggle from guest to guest, like a little cold, sharp-nosed snake, leaving its clammy trail wherever it passed.

In the first place the villa, which had been described glowingly by Lady Dauntrey to the Collises and Dodo Wardropp, was not what she had painted it. Indeed, as Dodo remarked to Miss Collis, it was not what any one had painted it, at least within the memory of man. Once it had been a rich gold colour, but many seasons of neglect had tarnished the gold to a freckled brown, which even the flowering creepers that should have cloaked it seemed to dislike. In depression they had shed most of their leaves; and bare serpent-branches, which might be purple with wistaria in the late spring long after everybody had gone to the north, coiled dismally over the fanlike roof of dirty glass that sheltered a

blistered front door. Inside, a faint odour of mouldiness hung in the air of the rooms, which had been shut up unoccupied for a long time. The ugly drab curtains in the drawing-room smelled of the moth-powder in which they had been wrapped through the summer heat. The imitation lace drapery underneath them had been torn and not mended. Bits of thick brown paper pasted over the windows during the hot months still stuck to the glass. The furniture was heavy, not old but middle-aged, lacking the charm of antiquity, and in the worst French taste. The pictures were banal; and there was no garden. More painful than all, the house was in the Condamine; and Dodo, when she had spent a few days at "Monte" on her way to England from Australia, had been told that "nobody who was anybody lived down in the Condamine: only the 'cheap people' went there." And Dodo did not consider herself a cheap person. She was paying high to be the guest of a "lady of title": she wanted her money's worth, and soon began to fear that there was doubt of getting it.

Servants had been engaged in advance for Lady Dauntrey by the agent who had let the house. There were too few; and it needed but the first night's dinner to prove that the cook was third rate, though Lady Dauntrey carefully referred to him as the *chef*. In addition to this person, occasionally seen flitting about in a dingy white cap, there was a man to wait at table and open the door — a man, Dodo said, with the face of a sulky cod-

fish; and a hawk-nosed, hollow-cheeked woman to "do the rooms" and act as maid to the ladies, none of the three having brought a maid of her own. Their hostess had said she could not put up her guests' servants, but they might "count upon a first-rate maid in the house." They reminded each other of this promise, the day after their arrival, and grumbled. Secundina had as much as she could do to keep the rooms in order; and the only other service she was able to give the visitors was to recount gruesome stories of the villa while she made their beds or took a top layer of dust off their dressing-tables. According to her, the Bella Vista was the cheapest furnished house to let in the principality, because years ago a murder had been committed in it. A woman had been killed for the sake of her jewels by the tenants, a husband and wife. They had kept her body in a trunk for days, and had attempted to get out of France with it, but had been arrested on their way to Italy. Nobody who was superstitious would live in the house, and so it was not often let. Secundina did not know where the murder had taken place, but believed it was in the dining-room, and that the trunk had been kept in the cellar.

It was Dodo to whom the tale was told, and she repeated it to Mrs. Collis and her daughter, the three having forgotten their slight differences in making common, secret cause against the Dauntreys, or, rather, against Lady Dauntrey; for they were inclined to like and be sorry for her husband,

pitying him because misfortune or weakness had brought him to the pass of marrying such a woman. "You could make a whole macadamized road out of her heart," remarked Mrs. Collis.

"It would serve her right if we all marched out of this loathsome den in a body," said Dodo, emphatically, when they had met to talk things over in the Collises' room. "She's a selfish cat and thinks of nobody but herself. She won't even let the men come near us girls if she can help it, though you and I both know perfectly well, Miss Collis, that she hinted about the most wonderful chances of great marriages, nothing lower than an earl at meanest. Not that you and I need look for husbands. But that isn't the point; for anyhow, she has no business to snap them out of our mouths. Now, she's jealous if Dom Ferdinand or the Marquis de Casablanca so much as looks at one of us. And she's given us the worst rooms, so she can take in other poor deluded creatures and get more money out of them. And there isn't enough to eat. And all the eggs and fish have had a past. And Secundina says there are black beetles as large as chestnuts in the kitchen. Still ——"

"Still," echoed Miss Collis, "Monseigneur's awfully interesting, and it's fun being in the same house with him; though I'm afraid he's selfish too, or he wouldn't calmly keep on his front room, when he can't help knowing we're stuffed into back ones without any view. Of course he *is* a royalty, so perhaps he has his dignity to think of. But I know

an American man wouldn't do such a thing, not even if he were a President."

"The Marquis is nice, too," said Mrs. Collis. "Lord Dauntrey tells me his family's one of the oldest in the 'Almanach de Gotha,' whatever *that* is. And Monseigneur and he are both great friends of the Dauntreys."

"Only of Lord Dauntrey," Dodo corrected her.

"Well, anyhow, they're likely to stay a while in this house, for whatever there is of the best, they get. And they're playing Lord Dauntrey's system with him at the Casino."

"And losing!"

"Yes. But Dom Ferdinand seems to have plenty of money."

"Secundina says the *chef* told her it was well known that Monseigneur hasn't a sou of his own, but borrows of people who believe in his Cause. Then he comes here and gambles with what he gets. According to the cook, he's a well-known figure at Monte Carlo, and sometimes calls out when he's playing in the Rooms, 'There's my cousin's head on that gold piece. It ought to be mine.'"

"His is a mighty good-looking head, anyhow," remarked Miss Collis thoughtfully. She herself was not rich, but her stepfather, a Chicago merchant, was enormously wealthy, and she was wondering whether, to give her a chance of possible queenhood, David Collis might not open his heart and his purse.

Dodo was at the same time asking herself what

would be the smallest sum Dom Ferdinand would consider worth looking at with a wife. Also she contemplated the idea of impressing him with the belief that she was a great heiress, until too late for him to change his mind in honour. But first he must fix his mind upon her. She would have been glad to create distrust of him in the hearts of Lottie Collis and her mother; and while they remained at the Bella Vista in Dom Ferdinand's society Dodo decided not to be frightened away by a few inconveniences. Nor did she wish the story of that long-ago murder to reach his ears. Dom Ferdinand had publicly announced that he was horribly superstitious, and perhaps he would not stay if he knew what had happened in the dining-room. He would think it brought bad luck to live in such a house, even if he could bear the idea of a ghost; for he talked of little else than what one ought to do in order to attract luck.

After a few days at Monte Carlo Lord Dauntrey began to find acquaintances, people he had known long ago in England before he was swallowed up in darkest Africa, or those he had met at hotels since his marriage — hotels chosen by Lady Dauntrey for the purpose of making useful friends. He had a certain wistful, weary charm of manner that was somehow likable and aroused sympathy, especially in women, though it was evident that he made no conscious effort to please.

There was a vague, floating rumour of some old, more than half-forgotten scandal about him: an

accident, giving the wrong drug when he was studying medicine as a very young man; a death; a sad story hushed up; a prudent disappearance from Europe, urged by annoyed aristocratic relatives who had little money to speed his departure, but gave what they could; professional failure in South Africa; some gambling-trouble in Johannesburg, and a vanishing again into the unknown. Nevertheless his title was an old one. Men of his race had loomed great in dim historic days, and though during the last two centuries no Dauntrey had done anything notable except lose money, sell land, go bankrupt, figure in divorce cases or card scandals, and marry actresses, they had never in their degeneration lost that charm which, in Charles II's day, had won from a pretty Duchess the nickname of the "darling Dauntreys."

The present viscount was the last and perhaps the least of his race; yet, because of his name and the lingering charm — like the sad perfume of *pot-pourri* clinging to a broken jar — he would have been given the prodigal's welcome at Monte Carlo (that agreeable pound for lost reputations) but for one drawback. The stumbling block was the woman he had made Lady Dauntrey.

In the permanent English colony on the Riviera, with its jewelled sprinkling of American millionaires and its glittering fringe of foreign notables, there are a few charming women upon whom depends the fate of newcomers. These great ladies turned down their thumbs when with experienced

eyes they looked upon Lord Dauntrey's wife, when their trained ears heard her voice, with its curiously foreign, slightly rough accent.

Nobody wanted or intended to turn an uncompromising back upon her. Lord Dauntrey and she could be invited to big entertainments — the mid-season "squashes" which wiped off boring obligations, paid compliments quickly and easily, and pleased the outer circles of acquaintanceship. But for intimate things, little luncheons and little dinners to the elect, she would not "do"; which was a pity — because as a bachelor Lord Dauntrey might have been furbished up and made to do quite well. As things stood, the best that could happen to the pair, if they were found to play bridge well, was to be asked to the bridge parties of the great; while for other entertainments they would have to depend on outsiders to whom a title was a title, no matter how tarnished or how tattered.

As Rose Winter had said to Carleton, "Who *isn't* Who, if they can play bridge?" But it had been important for Lady Dauntrey's plans not to be received on sufferance. She had meant and expected to be some one in particular. In the South African past of which people here knew nothing, but began to gossip much, it had been her dream to marry a man who could lead her at once to the drawing-room floor of society, and she saw no reason in herself why she should not be a shining light there. She knew that she was handsome, and fascinating to men, and while using her gifts as best she could,

always she had burned with an almost fierce desire to make more of them, to be a beauty and a social star, like those women of whom she read in the "society columns" of month-old London papers, women not half as attractive as she. She had felt in herself the qualities necessary for success in a different world from any she had known; and because, during a period when she was a touring actress she had played the parts of great ladies, she had told herself confidently that she would know without any other teaching how great ladies should talk, behave, and dress.

"Who *was* she?" people asked each other, of course, when she and her husband appeared at Monte Carlo in the beginning of the season, and Lord Dauntrey began quietly, unobtrusively, to remind old acquaintances of his own or of his dead uncle's (the last viscount's) existence. Nobody could answer that question; but "*What* was she?" seemed simpler of solution as a puzzle, at least in a negative way; for certainly she was not a lady. And one or two Americans who had lived in the South of their own country insisted that she had a "touch of the tar brush." She confessed to having passed some years in South Africa, "in the country a good deal of the time." And something was said by gossips who did not know much, about a first husband who had been "a doctor in some God-forsaken hole." Perhaps that was true, people told each other; and if so, it explained how she and Dauntrey had met; because it was generally understood that he had been,

or tried to be, a doctor in South Africa. Thus the story went round that he had been her late husband's assistant, and had married her when she was free.

Even the first ten days in Monte Carlo showed Lady Dauntrey that her brilliant scheme for the season was doomed to failure: and that heart of hers, out of which Mrs. Collis said a whole macadamized road might be made, grew sick with disappointment and anxiety

She had married Dauntrey — almost forced him to marry her, in fact, by fanning the dying embers of his chivalry — because she expected through him to realize her ambitions. Under this motive lay another — an almost savage love, not unlike the love for an Apache of the female of his kind. Only, Dauntrey was not an Apache at heart, and Eve Ruthven was. Eve, of course, was not her real name. She had been Emma Cotton until she went on the stage twenty years ago, at sixteen; but she was the type of woman who admires and takes the name of Eve. And Mrs. Ruthven she had been as wife and widow after the theatrical career had been abandoned in disaster. Something in her nature would have yearned toward Dauntrey if he had had nothing to recommend him to her ambition; but she would have resisted her own inclination for a penniless man without a title.

What money there was between them had been saved in one way or other by her; but, as Dodo Wardropp surmised, there was far less than Mrs.

Ruthven had persuaded Lord Dauntrey to believe. At first she had worked upon the overmastering passion of his nature, where most other loves and desires were burnt out or broken down: the passion for gambling. He had told her about the roulette system which he had invented, a wonderful system, in practising which with a roulette watch or a toy wheel, he had managed to get through dreadful years of banishment, without dying of boredom. She had encouraged him to hope that with her money they would have enough capital to play the system successfully at Monte Carlo, and win fortune in a way which for long had been the dream of his life, as hers had been to become a personage in "real society."

With five thousand pounds, Lord Dauntrey was confident that he could win through the worst possible slide the system was likely to experience, playing with louis stakes. Mrs. Ruthven mentioned that she had eight thousand pounds. After he had asked her to marry him, and she had said yes, and told everybody she knew, about the engagement — including newspaper men in Johannesburg — Dauntrey discovered that the figure she had mentioned was in hundreds, not thousands. But she sobbed out a passionate confession, saying she had lied because she loved him: and they could still go to Monte Carlo, with a plan she had, and try the system with five-franc pieces instead of louis.

It was a long time since any one had loved Dauntrey. He was lonely, and hated to hurt a woman.

Besides, five-franc pieces were better than nothing, and he was sick to death of South Africa.

They had got through the spring and summer in England partly on their wits, partly through impressing landlords and travelling nonenities with their social importance, and partly through their successes at bridge. For they both played bridge extremely well, too well, it had once or twice been said of Lord Dauntrey in South Africa.

Lady Dauntrey's "plan" was to get together as many paying guests as possible, enlist their interest in the "system," or, if they could not be persuaded into that, to earn for herself something even better than board-money, by introducing rich girls to men of title. She had not doubted her opportunities for thrusting her female pigeons into society, or of getting hold of young foreign aristocrats, perhaps even Englishmen, who were "out for dollars," as her girls would be out for dukes — or the next best thing after dukes. And she had begun well.

The house she had secured was cheap; and she brought with her from England three women who would alone pay more than enough to keep it up. Her husband's friend, Dom Ferdinand de Trevanna, and his faithful follower, the Marquis de Casablanca, had fulfilled a promise to meet them at Monte Carlo on the day after their arrival at the villa. Several other guests were expected — the young widow of a rich stockbroker; two Jewish heiresses who still called themselves girls; an elderly, impecunious English earl; an Austrian count who had failed to

find a wife in England, and a naval lieutenant who was heir to an impoverished baronetcy: a set of people sure to be congenial, because each wanted something which another could give. Everything ought to have been satisfactory, even from Dauntrey's point of view, for he had interested all the men in his system, and what money they could spare would be put into it; he would play for the "syndicate"; or if the men preferred gambling themselves, they must give him something for the system which he was prepared to teach.

When she arrived at Monte Carlo on a beautiful day of sunshine, which seemed a good omen, Eve Dauntrey believed that at last luck had turned for her. She thought that the thing she had longed for, year after year, was coming at last; and she was proud of the plan she had made, proud of the way in which she had worked it out. But the moment she entered the villa in the Condamine, her spirits were damped almost as if, by some monkey-trick, a jug of cold water had been upset on her head as the door opened to let her in. She felt the same depression fall upon the minds of the others, as shadows can be seen to move and grow long at sunset. She knew that the Collises and Dodo Wardropp were going to be dissatisfied, and that they would talk against the house and their accommodation in it, behind her back, saying that she had deliberately deceived them.

Still, there were Dom Ferdinand and Casablanca. There was no deceit where they were concerned.

They wanted to meet girls with money, and Dodo and Lottie wanted to meet men of title. There ought to be no danger that any members of this party would leave solely because the cooking was poor and the rooms badly furnished; and it was really Eve's wish to throw the four together, so that they need not miss certain things which lacked in her promised programme. But she had counted without herself. It was not in her to surrender any men who might be near, to other women, even when surrendering them would be to her advantage. In her heart she despised Lottie Collis and Dodo Wardropp, and she had to try her own weapons against theirs. She could not help this, and did it almost unconsciously.

Throughout her whole life since she was fifteen she had lived by and sometimes fallen by the fascination she had for men; not all men, but many, and most of those whose type appealed to her. She could never resist testing its power, even now when she loved the man she had married, and would ruthlessly have sacrificed any other for him. She tried it upon Dom Ferdinand and the Marquis de Casablanca. They struggled, because they wished to make an impression upon the two girls in the house; but they could not hold out against the allurement of the primitive woman in Lady Dauntrey, and though they paid the girls compliments and went about with them docilely, they looked at Eve. And the girls saw not only the looks, but the weapons which Lady Dauntrey used to win the men

for herself, when she ought to have been furthering her guests' interests. They began to hate her, and soon realized that she would not be able to introduce them to the "best set" at Monte Carlo, as she had promised. Still they stayed on, hoping a little, for other people were expected to join the house party, and there was a chance yet of something better. Besides, they found a small and bitter pleasure in seeing the disappointment and humiliation of the woman who had been so sure of herself, and had, by the force of her own strong personality, made them sure of her. Dodo and the Collises, travelling out of their own country for the first time, had not — as they acknowledged to each other now — "known the difference in foreigners." It was only by the light in other women's eyes — women of good birth and breeding — that they began to see Lady Dauntrey as she was, common, bold, not a lady, one whom ladies would not care to receive.

Dodo also was common, and knew herself to be "nobody" at home, but she had thought that she might "go down in England," if she could have the right introductions. Now she saw that her money was being wasted at the start; for though the Dauntreys attracted a certain set round them, instinctively she, as well as the Collises, felt that it was not the right set.

Even when, after ten days of Monte Carlo, the Villa Bella Vista was full of the Dauntreys' paying guests, a cold sense of insecurity and trouble to

come, which would be worse by and by than the bitter disappointment of the present, lay heavy upon Eve's heart. Her ménage was uncomfortable, and people were threatening to go. Every day nearly she had a "scene" with some one, a guest or a servant, or both. Mrs. Collis had burst into tears at a luncheon in honour of a rich Jewish money-lender, because she thought herself insulted. She had been given a kitchen dish-towel instead of a napkin, and had spoiled the party by complaining of it. The stupid creature! As if some one were not obliged to put up with the thing, since there were not enough napkins to go round for so many! Lady Dauntrey had explained that she could not take the dish-towel herself, as Monseigneur was on her right hand, Mr. Holbein on her left. But even the fact that Lord Dauntrey contented himself with a dust cloth did not appease Mrs. Collis, who said it was only the last feather on the top of other grievances. And Dodo was furious because, whenever Lady Dauntrey entertained, the servants were so busy that she had to make her own bed, or see it lie tumbled just as she had got out of it, until evening. Eve's violent temper had got the better of her then, and she had flung her true opinion of Miss Wardropp into the pretty painted face. "Persons who've never had anything decent at home always complain more than any one else in other people's houses," she had said; and Dodo had retorted with compliments of the same kind.

Miss Wardropp often wondered if Lady Daun-

trey knew the history of the Villa Bella Vista. She did know, the agent having felt obliged to confess, lest later she might hear the story and try to get out of her bargain on the strength of it. But he had eloquently explained that if there were no drawback the house — being a large one with many rooms — would have commanded twice the price at which he could offer it to her ladyship. He had added that the murder, committed long ago, had been almost forgotten by every one except old inhabitants; and as the villa had been occupied by several tenants since its evil days, and thoroughly redecorated, it need no longer have disagreeable associations even for the most sensitive minds.

Lady Dauntrey's mind was not sensitive. She had hoped that her guests would not hear the tale, and she had thought that she would not care herself. Perhaps she would not have cared, if everything had gone as well with her and her husband as they had expected, for then she would have been cheerful, and could have laughed at superstition. But when the people she wanted to know would not know her, when Dauntrey's system did not work as it had worked on the toy roulette, when the servants stole, or left without notice, and when the guests quarrelled and complained, she began to feel that there was a curse upon the house. She fancied that, if she had not taken it, but had run larger risks and chosen a more expensive villa, perhaps things would have been better.

In spite of herself she thought a great deal about

the man and the woman who had done the murder. From the agent she had heard no details, and though the case had made a great sensation at the time it happened, years ago, she had been far away in South Africa, and had not given much attention to it. Some sly hints of Secundina's, however, had shown her that the servants knew, and she had not been able to resist asking questions. Afterward she could not put out of her head Secundina's description of the dreadful couple.

The man had been of good birth, the woman *bourgeoise*, but clever. They had gambled and made money, eventually losing it again, and all their capital besides. Then they had grown desperate, at their wits' end, and they had killed a woman who trusted and thought of them as her friends. At night, when Eve lay awake worrying, as she often did — especially when Dauntrey had been losing — she seemed to see the two haggard faces staring at her hopelessly, growing and taking shape in the darkness. Worse than all, she seemed to understand something in their eyes which they wished to make her understand. She wondered if, by any chance, the room where she and her husband slept had been theirs, and if between these walls they had talked over the murder before committing it. She imagined how they had felt, how they had hated and rebelled against the idea at first, then accepted it as the one thing left to do. The story was that the woman had persuaded the man to consent, though he had refused at first.

One day, after a worse quarrel than any that had gone before, Mrs. Collis left with Lottie, packing up in a hurry, and driving off to a hotel. This gave Lady Dauntrey an empty room; and already Dodo had twice vowed that she too would go. Now, in all probability the Collises would persuade her to join them; and perhaps an epidemic of departure would sweep through the villa. Lord Dauntrey had suffered a serious setback; and all the money received from the guests was needed to retrieve this accident. Dom Ferdinand had lost so much that he could not pay at all until a further remittance came to him; and as odd stories of the household had leaked out through dissatisfied servants, several tradesmen had begun to make themselves objectionable. Strangers are not trusted in the shops at Monte Carlo, and the butcher threatened to send no more meat to the Bella Vista unless he were paid what was owing.

This happened when the Dauntreys had been in their villa three weeks; and that same afternoon at the Casino Lady Dauntrey spoke to Mary Grant. It was then two days before Christmas.

Often she had looked at Mary and felt inclined to speak, but always something had happened to prevent, or else Dodo or the Collises had been near, and she had known that they would say to each other, "Look at the woman making up to that girl now because she's winning such a lot. Any one who's got money is good enough for her." But this time the conversation came about easily, as

though it were meant to be. She was watching Mary's play, standing behind the next chair. Suddenly a man occupying the chair got up and went away from the table. Instantly Lady Dauntrey dropped into the vacant place, as if she had been waiting for it.

She did not really wish to play, though she liked gambling, for she had been unlucky in the small game she had attempted, and had grown cautious, anxious to keep what she had. But on a crowded night it is almost obligatory to play if one has annexed a chair which many people would like to have. Eve reluctantly took out two louis, the only coins in her imitation gold bag. She was not near a croupier, and having seen already that a few five-franc pieces lay among her neighbour's gold and notes, she asked Mary with a pleasant smile if she would mind changing a louis for her. "I'm not lucky, like you," she said, "so I'm afraid to play with gold."

Mary pushed four five-franc pieces along the table, and would have been only too glad not to accept the gold in exchange, but of course she could not make a present of money to Lady Dauntrey. "I shall be delighted," she said.

"You're sure you're not wanting your silver?" Eve inquired.

"Oh, no, thank you. I sometimes put five francs on zero *en plein* to protect half a stake on a simple chance," Mary explained, now thoroughly conversant with every intricacy of the game that had

been so kind to her. "But zero's been up three times in half an hour, so I don't think I shall bother with it again for a while. And, anyhow, I'm not playing for a few minutes. Sometimes I feel as if I must wait for an inspiration."

"I wish I ever had one!" sighed Lady Dauntrey, hesitating over one of her big silver coins. "Do tell me where to put this. You're so wonderful, you might bring even me a stroke of luck."

"But I should be so distressed if I made you lose," Mary said, as gravely as if the five-franc piece in question had been a *mille* note. "But — well — if it were mine, I rather think I should try ten. I've no inspiration for myself this time; but I seem to see ten floating in the air around you, and that's the way my inspirations come. I see numbers or colours, and then I play on them."

"I'll try it!" Eve exclaimed. "But will you put the money on for me? I want all your luck, and none of my own."

Mary pushed the five-franc piece on to the number 10, using a rake of her own which Dick Carleton had given her. It was a glorified rake, which he had ordered specially for her, made of ebony with the initials "M. G." set into it in little sapphires, her favourite stones.

Ten came up, and Lady Dauntrey was enchanted. She even felt an impulse of gratitude, and a superstitious conviction that this girl would be for her a bringer of good fortune.

"I've so often watched your play, and wanted to tell you how much I admired it," she said, "but I never quite had the courage."

Lady Dauntrey did not look like a woman who would lack courage for anything she wished to do, but Mary saw no reason to disbelieve her word, and indeed did not judge or criticise at all, except by instinct; and people had only to look sad or complain of their ill luck to arouse a sympathy stronger than any instinct against them.

"I think it's very nice of you to speak," she replied, politely. Both murmured in subdued tones, in order not to annoy other players.

"I recognized you, of course, the first time I saw you in the Casino," Lady Dauntrey went on, "as the lovely girl who came south in the train with us. We've all been longing to know you."

This was untrue. Anxious to propitiate Society as far as possible, Eve had avoided recognizing Mary, who might be looked upon as a doubtful person — a young girl, always strikingly dressed, living alone at a fashionable and gay hotel, playing high at the Casino, and picking up odd acquaintances. But now Lady Dauntrey was abandoning all hope that Society might let her pass over its threshold, and she was willing to defy it for the sake of money. This girl was at least a lady, which Dodo was not, nor was Mrs. Ernstein, the stockbroker's widow. Eve thought it would be a good thing if Miss Grant could be persuaded to come and stay at the Villa Bella Vista in the room left vacant by the Collises.

Mary was rather flattered, but she now had an inspiration to play, and did not want to go on talking. "I think ten will come up again, or else eleven," she said, with the misty look in her eyes which was always there at the Casino, or when her thoughts were intent on gambling. "I shall play the two numbers *à cheval.*"

She put on a maximum, Lady Dauntrey hastily placing a five-franc piece, not on the *cheval*, but more timidly on the six numbers of which ten and eleven were two. Mary lost and Eve won, for thirteen came up. The same thing happened several times in succession. If Mary chose a number, Lady Dauntrey included it in a *transversale simple*, or took the dozen in which it was. Mary invariably lost, while she won. It was as if she gave Mary bad luck, while Mary brought her good fortune, for never had Mary so often lost, never had Eve won so often in succession.

At last all the money which Mary had brought with her was exhausted, and Lady Dauntrey, who had raked in more than twenty louis, offered laughingly to lend her something to go on with. But Mary thanked her and refused, in spite of the tradition of the tables that borrowed money brings back good luck.

"I'm rather tired, and my head aches a little," she said. "I think I'll go home."

Eve rose also. "You call the Hôtel de Paris 'home?'" she asked.

"I begin to feel quite at home," Mary answered.

"I've been there nearly three weeks, and it seems longer."

They walked together out of the bright room of the large decorative picture called jestingly "The Three Disgraces," on through the Salle Schmidt, and so to the atrium. "If you don't mind," said Lady Dauntrey, "I'll go with you as far as your hotel. There's a hat in a shop round the corner I've been dying for. Now, thanks to the luck you've brought me, I shall treat myself to it, as a kind of Christmas present. You know, day after to-morrow will be Christmas. Surely you'll be rather lonely in your 'home' then, or have you friends who are going to take you away for the day?"

"No," Mary replied, as they went down the steps of the Casino. "No one has mentioned Christmas. I suppose people don't think as much about celebrating Christmas here, where it's almost like summer. Besides, I have very few friends."

"Haven't you made a good many acquaintances?"

"Not many. Four or five. One lady has called — I think she is the wife of the chaplain of the Church of England — but I was out, and I haven't returned her visit yet. One seems to have so little time here! And the curé of Roquebrune, the village on the hill, has been — twice. I was out both times. I'm always out, I'm afraid. But that reminds me, I must send him a Christmas present for his church."

"I should be delighted if you'd dine with us on Christmas night," said Lady Dauntrey, cordially.

"Do! At eight o'clock. We have such a merry party with us — all young, or if not young they feel so, which is the true Christmas spirit."

"You're very kind ——" Mary began; but suspecting hesitation, Lady Dauntrey broke in. "That's settled, then. I'm *so* pleased! And would you care to go to a dance on Christmas eve? — a rather wonderful dance it will be, on board a big yacht in the harbour. You must have noticed her — *White Lady* her name is — and she belongs to Mr. Samuel Holbein, the South African millionaire. You've heard of him, of course. His wife and daughter are on board, and they've begged me to bring as many girls to the dance as I can, for there'll be a lot of men. You know there are heaps more young men about here than there are girls — so unusual except at Monte Carlo."

"A dance on a yacht!" Mary echoed. The idea tempted her, though she hardly felt friendly enough yet with Lady Dauntrey to accept two invitations from her at once. "It sounds interesting."

"It will be. Do say yes. I shall love to chaperon you."

They were at the steps of the Hôtel de Paris.

"Then I say 'yes,'" answered Mary, "and thank you!"

In a few minutes it was all arranged. And Lady Dauntrey bade Miss Grant goodbye, gayly, calling her a "mascotte." She turned the corner as if to go to the shop of the hats. But there was no hat there which she particularly wanted. She had

merely sought an excuse to walk as far as the Hôtel de Paris with Mary. When the girl had disappeared behind the glass doors, Eve went back quickly to the Casino, where her husband was playing. She could not bear to be long away from him when he was there. It was agony not to know whether he had lost or won.

XV

After the aviation week Vanno Della Robbia still had the excuse of waiting for Prince Angelo and his bride. It was as well therefore to be at Monte Carlo as anywhere else in the neighbourhood of the villa they would occupy at Cap Martin.

They had been detained in England by a "command" visit to royalty, but would soon come to the Riviera. In a letter Angelo asked his younger brother to go over to Cap Martin and look at the house, which Vanno did: and prolonging his excursion to the ruined, historic convent on the Cap, met Miss Grant strolling there with Jim Schuyler and Dick Carleton. He passed near enough to hear that Schuyler was telling the legend of the place: how the nuns played a joke on the men of Roquebrune, the appointed guardians of their safety, by ringing the alarm bell to see if the soldiers of the castle town on the hill would indeed turn out to the rescue. How the very night after the men had run down in vain, the bell pealed out again, and the guardians remained snugly in their beds, only to hear next day that this time the alarm had been real. Saracens had sacked the convent, carried off all the young and pretty nuns, and murdered the old ones.

Schuyler and Carleton both bowed to Vanno, whom they had met several times during the "flying week" at Nice, and Schuyler interrupted his story long enough to say to Mary, "That's Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, who invented the parachute Rongier tested so successfully the other day. Dick met him once in Egypt. He goes star-gazing in the desert, I believe, consorting with Arabs, and learning all sorts of Eastern *patois*."

Neither Vanno (who caught the sound of his name in passing) nor Schuyler guessed the half-reluctant interest with which Mary heard the name of her sulky neighbour at the Hôtel de Paris, and learned those few details of his life.

Vanno had been more than once to Roquebrune since the first day, and knew that the curé had called twice upon Miss Grant, without finding her at home. He knew, too, that the priest had received no visit from her in return; nor had he again seen or heard of the "strange lady" who had come to question him about Prince Angelo.

Vanno was deeply disappointed at the failure of his plan, and feared that Mary wished to avoid knowing the priest; otherwise she might at least have gone to church at Roquebrune. She made other excursions, when she could tear herself from the Casino, on irresistibly bright afternoons. Not only had he seen her at Cap Martin, but in Nice and in Mentone; once, motoring into Italy with people whose faces were strange to Vanno, and unpromising; and with the same party again in the beautiful garden

at Beaulieu, where it is fashionable to drink tea and watch the sunset. But she did not make time to go to Roquebrune, and show a little graceful gratitude for the curé's kindly interest.

The desire grew stronger in Vanno to speak to her, to know something of her besides the perhaps deceiving beauty of her face, but he clung in firmness or obstinacy to the resolve of which he had told his friend. He knew that he could not help her as the curé might, and secretly he feared himself. Once the ice was broken in making her acquaintance, he was not sure that he could still be strong.

But one afternoon he had been taking a long walk alone, as was his custom every day. Coming down from a Ligurian fort, by an old mule track that ended on the upper Corniche road, he saw an automobile which had stopped at the foot of the path. A girl in a rose-red motor-bonnet and a moleskin coat was standing up in the car, her eyes raised, her chin lifted like a flower tilted in its stem, intent on something which Vanno could not see. The girl was Miss Grant, and Vanno's heart gave a bound, then seemed to contract at sight of her, so near him and alone.

The automobile was drawn up so close to the descending mule path that Vanno saw it would be impossible to pass unless the chauffeur started the engine and moved the car on a little; but rather than this should be necessary, he halted abruptly a few yards above the level of the road.

The rattle of footsteps on rough cobbles roused Mary from her study of the thing which Vanno could not see. She glanced up, expecting some peasant who would want to pass her car. At sight of the Prince halted on the path and looking down into her uplifted face, she blushed. It was just such a blush as had dyed her cheeks painfully the night when he frowned in answer to her friendly smile; and Vanno knew that she was thinking of it. The remorse he had suffered then, when too late, came back to him. If she had not blushed now in the same childlike, hurt way, he was sure that he could have kept to his resolution not to speak. He would simply have stood still, gazing away into distance until she was ready to go on; or at most he would have said with cool politeness, "Please don't let me disturb you. I am in no hurry to pass." But in an instant it rushed over him that here was his chance to atone for an unkindness, and that if he did not quickly seize it he would be sorry all the rest of his life. Besides, it flashed into his mind that by speaking of a certain thing he could easily lead up to the subject of the curé. He wanted very much to know whether she attached any importance to the visits of the priest.

Vanno took off his hat to Mary, bowing gravely. He had guessed her reason for bringing the car to rest at this place, and it gave him his excuse. A step or two farther down the mule path brought him near enough to speak without raising his voice. "I think," he said, "you must have stopped here to look

at the marble tablet set in the rock. Will you let me tell you something about it — unless you know its history already?"

"I thank you. I don't know. I was wondering about it." Mary stammered a little, blushing very deeply, partly with embarrassment — though she was not embarrassed when other strangers spoke to her — partly in surprise at hearing the "Roman Prince" speak English like an Englishman. "Please do tell me."

Before he spoke, she had given a quick order to the chauffeur to move on and leave the end of the mule path free. Now the heart of the motor began to beat, and the car rolled a few feet farther on. Vanno came out into the thick white dust of the much-travelled road, and he and Mary could both look up to the tablet he had mentioned.

It was an oblong piece of marble, set high on the face of gray rock which on one side walled the upper Corniche, Napoleon's road. On it was the curious inscription: "Remember eternal at my heart. February, 1881."

"It is so strange," Mary said, trying to seem at ease, and not show the slightest emotion. It was ridiculous to feel emotion! Yet she could not help being absurdly happy, because this man who had snubbed her once and apparently disapproved her always was speaking to her of his own accord, in kindness.

"'Remember eternal at my heart?' It's like the English of a person not English. But why did he

not have the words put in his own language, which he knew?"

"That is what everybody wonders," Vanno said, finding it as difficult as Mary found it, not to show that this conversation was of immense, exciting importance. "It puzzled me so much when I first came this way that I couldn't get it out of my head. I asked a friend who has lived for years not many miles away, if he could tell me what it meant."

"And could he tell you?"

"He told me a story which he believed but would not vouch for. Only, a very old inhabitant told it to him. It appeals to me as true. It must be true." A new warmth stole into Vanno's voice as he spoke. They had both been looking up at the tablet on the rock, but as that thrill like a chord on a violin struck her ear, Mary turned to him. Their eyes met, as they had so often met, but to-day there was no coldness in Vanno's, or hurt pride in Mary's.

"Can you think of any reason for the bad English?" he asked. He longed to hear what she would say.

She thought for a minute. "Could it be," she reflected aloud, "that the person who had the tablet put up associated this place with some one who was English — maybe a woman, if he was a man — and so he wanted to use her language, not his own?"

"You have guessed right!" exclaimed Vanno, boyishly delighted with her intuition. "He was an

Italian. He loved an English girl." The romantic dark eyes which had so often burned with gloomy fire in looking at her burned with a different flame for an instant; then quickly, as if with a common impulse, the girl and the man tore their looks apart. "They met here on the Riviera," Vanno went on, not quite steadily. "It was at this spot they first found out that they loved each other, according to the story of my friend."

He paused involuntarily. His mouth was dry. When he began to explain the tablet, he had not realized what it would be like to tell the story to this girl at this place. It was as if some other voice, talking above his with his words, gave a meaning and an emphasis which must be unmistakable to her. It was hard to go on, for with each sentence he would surely stumble deeper into difficulty. Yet the silence was electrical. Unsaid things seemed rustling in ambush. He dared not look again at Mary, and he felt that she dared not look at him. But it was necessary to go on, and he took up the narrative clumsily, fearing to tangle the thread.

"The Italian asked the girl to marry him — here, where we stand. And they were engaged. But in a few weeks or months something happened. My friend is not sure whether she died, or whether some one came between them. He is sure only that they parted. And afterward the man had this tablet put up to mark the spot where he had lived his happiest hour."

"It is a sad story," Mary said.

"Yes. It is sad. But it is beautiful, too. He was faithful. 'Remember eternal at my heart.'"

"Perhaps those were the very words he spoke to her here, when — they loved each other and he was trying to talk in her language."

"I thought of that, too. It's almost certain he said these words, to assure her that he could never forget this place."

"No one else can forget, who knows the story. It makes the tablet seem haunted."

"Would you be afraid to see the ghosts of those lovers?" Vanno asked.

"No," Mary answered. "For if he too is dead — and 1881 is quite a long time ago! — they must be happy together now. Happy ghosts would try to give happiness to others."

Instantly the sentiment was uttered Mary regretted it. She feared that the man might think she associated herself with him in some vague hope of happiness. "I trust at least," she hurried on, "that the story of the lovers is true."

"It was the curé of Roquebrune who told it to me. He thinks it more probable than two or three other tales," Vanno said, speaking slowly, to impress the name of his informant upon the girl. "The curé is a most interesting man. Perhaps you've met him?" He asked this question doubtfully, lest Mary should guess that it was to him she owed the curé's visits; but she was unsuspicious

"No. He called on me when I was out. I don't know why he came," she said. She looked a little

guilty, because she would have gone up to the church of Roquebrune after the second call if she had not been afraid that the curé had been sent to see her by some one at home who had found out that she was on the Riviera. Vanno, misunderstanding her change of expression, said no more, though he had begun his story with the intention of leading up to this. They parted with polite thanks from Mary for his information, thanks which seemed banal, a strange anti-climax coming after the story of the lovers. Yet they went away from one another with an aftermath of their first unreasoning happiness still lingering in their hearts. That night at dinner they bowed to each other slightly; and during the week that followed before Christmas eve, sometimes Vanno almost believed in the girl; sometimes he lost hope of her, and was plunged from his unreasoning happiness to the dark depths of a still more unreasoning despair. But he knew that she thought of him. He saw it in her eyes, or in the turn of her head if she ostentatiously looked away from him. And he did not know whether he were glad or sorry, for he saw no good that could come of what he began to call his infatuation.

The morning of Christmas eve arrived, and with it a telegram to say that Angelo and his bride Marie were delayed again until the eve of New Year's Day, the great fête of France. Vanno was disappointed, for he had expected them that night, and would have liked to be with them on Christmas. He resolved to invite the curé to dine with him on

Christmas night; and meanwhile, strolling on the Casino terrace in the hope of seeing Mary, he ran across Jean Rongier, the airman, the young French baron who had achieved a sensational success at Nice for the new Della Robbia parachute. On the strength of this feat the two had become good friends, and Vanno had been up several times in Rongier's Bleriot monoplane.

"A favour, *mon ami,*" Rongier began as they met. "I was on the point of calling at your hotel, to ask it of you. Go with me to-night to a dance on board the big yacht *White Lady,* that you can see down there in the harbour."

"Many thanks, but no!" laughed Vanno. "I haven't danced since I was twenty; and even if I had I don't know *White Lady's* owner.'

"That is nothing," said Rongier. "Nobody knows him, but every one is going — that is, all the men we know are going; and you will go, to please me."

"I'd do a good deal to please you, but not that," Vanno persisted.

"If I tell you a lady whom I am anxious — particularly anxious — to please, will be angry with me if you refuse? She makes it a point that I bring you."

"That's a different matter," said Vanno good-naturedly. "I suppose she doesn't make it a point for me to stay through the whole evening?"

"You can settle that with her," Rongier reassured him. "I thought you wouldn't fail me.

She's heard about your blue comet and your yellow desert, and your new parachute, and has probably mixed them all up; but the result is that she wants to meet you."

"Very kind. I wish I could do the comet and the desert the same credit you do the parachute. But who is 'She'?"

"Miss Holbein, the daughter of the yacht's owner. English people here, I understand, won't know her father because he was once an I. D. B. and is now a money-lender; but thank heaven we who have Latin blood in our veins are neither snobs nor hypocrites. By the way, Holbein called some fellow at the Casino a 'snob' the other night, and the man returned, 'If I were a snob, I wouldn't know you.' Holbein thought it so smart he goes about repeating the story against himself, which proves he balances his millions with a sense of humour. Miss Holbein is handsome. Jewesses can be the most beautiful women in the world, don't you think? and though she is snubbed by the *grandes dames* here and perhaps elsewhere, I notice that snubs generally come home to roost. She will have all the millions one day, and she is clever enough to pay people back in their own coin — not coin that she would miss in spending. And she is clever enough to be Madame la Baronne Rongier, wife to the idol of the French people, if she thinks it worth while! Just for the moment, though, I am on my probation. I dare refuse her nothing she wants, and she wants Prince Giovanni Della Robbia at her mother's dance."

"That unworthy person is at her service," Vanno said, bored at the prospect, but willing to please his friend.

Mrs. Ernstein and Dodo Wardropp were eagerly looking forward to the Christmas eve dance on board *White Lady*. Mrs. Collis and Lottie had been looking forward to it too; and after they went from the villa they wrote almost humbly to ask Mrs. Holbein if they might still come, though they were no longer with her friend Lady Dauntrey. To their joy and surprise she had written back cordially to say she hoped most certainly they would come, and bring friends. She had seemed far from cordial to them or anybody else when lunching at the Villa Bella Vista on the unfortunate occasion of the dish-towel; indeed, she had been lymphatic, and had scarcely troubled to speak to any one; but now the Collises thought they had misjudged her.

This was the first entertainment for which Lady Dauntrey had contrived to secure invitations for her guests; and Dodo, Mrs. Ernstein, and the Collises had been delightedly telling every one they knew (not a large number) that they were going to the *White Lady* dance. It was a pleasure at last to be able to tell of something happening to them which might excite envy. So far, they had felt that as the Dauntreys' guests they were being pitied or laughed at by those they would have liked to impress.

There was no doubt that the Holbeins, being enormously rich, would do everything very well;

and Lady Dauntrey remarked more than once that Mrs. Holbein had told her people were "simply crawling" for invitations.

Not till the last moment did Eve inform any one that she was taking Miss Grant, for she had not yet mentioned speaking to her the other day at the Casino. It was arranged that, the villa being much nearer than the Hôtel de Paris to the yacht, Mary should call for her chaperon; therefore, as Eve had said nothing, it was a great surprise when the house party had assembled in the drawing-room, putting on their wraps and buttoning their gloves, to hear the "sulky codfish" announce Miss Grant.

Mary walked into the dull drab room in a dress which appeared to be made entirely of fine gold tissue, her hair banded with a wreath of diamond laurel leaves, which made her look extraordinarily Greek and classic.

No one else, not even the rich Mrs. Ernstein, had a dress which compared to this, and Mary's entrance was received in shocked silence by the ladies, with the exception of Eve, who greeted her "mascotte" warmly, with compliments.

Lady Dauntrey's efforts to make the drawing-room more habitable before Mary saw it would have seemed almost pathetic to any one who understood; and they had seemed pathetic to Lord Dauntrey. He was more or less in her confidence, and still under her spell. It was for him, she had said, that she wanted to secure a new paying-guest who had plenty of money to put into the "system," and who loved

gambling better than anything else. He had helped Eve and the codfish decorate both drawing-room and dining-room for Christmas, in order that Mary might take a fancy to the place, and consent to come as a boarder. There were a good many pine branches pinned on to curtains and stuck into huge, ugly Japanese vases, a few wreaths hiding damp or dirty patches on the wall. Crookedly hung pictures had been straightened; some Christmas magazines were lying about, and bowls of chrysanthemums relieved the room of its wonted gloom. It really had almost a festive air; and after her rather lonely life at the hotel, the place and the people seemed pleasant to Mary. She was so enchanted with a little shivering marmoset, which Miss Wardropp had bought of a wandering monkey-merchant in the Galerie Charles Trois, that Dodo forgave her the wonderful dress and filet, if she did not quite forgive Lady Dauntrey the surprise. Then Mrs. Ernstein produced two trained sparrows, which she called her "mosquito hawks" and took with her everywhere. Mary told them both about an adorable blue frog named Hilda which she had bought at a Mentone china-shop; and in comparing pets the atmosphere cleared. They all started off in cabs for the harbour and *White Lady's* slip, where a motor-launch from the yacht would meet them; and Mary made friends with Dom Ferdinand, who was the only man in the carriage with her and Lady Dauntrey.

Arriving at the slip they found Major Norwood and the Maharajah of Indorwana also waiting for the

launch, with Captain Hannaford; and Mary introduced all three to the party from the Villa Bella Vista, whom they did not yet know. Then came Dick Carleton, alone, for Schuyler had firmly refused to sacrifice himself on the altar of friendship, and half a dozen smart, merry little officers of the Chasseurs Alpins, stationed at Mentone, and up at the lonely fort on Mont Agel. By this time it was late, for Lady Dauntrey wished to make a dramatic entry after most of the guests had already come on board, and the wish was more than granted. She, with her gorgeous widow and the two girls, attended by fifteen men, burst upon the crowd, who, for the best of reasons, had not yet begun to dance. Besides Mrs. Holbein and her daughter, there was not another woman present until the party from the Villa Bella Vista appeared.

Seldom could there have been a more curious scene, upon a magnificently appointed yacht, decorated for a dance. Already, when Lady Dauntrey and her impromptu train arrived, forty or fifty men were assembled on a deck screened in by flags and masses of palms and flowers. A Hungarian band imported from Paris was playing, not dance music, for that would have been a mockery in the circumstances, but gay marches and lively airs to cheer drooping spirits. Of all the women invited (some of whom Mrs. Holbein scarcely knew) only Lady Dauntrey and her house-party had accepted, for word had gone forth from the Elect that, in good American slang, the notorious Jew money-lender

and his common wife were "the limit." As for the girl, she did not count, except in cash. Now, when it was too late, Mrs. Holbein desperately regretted that she had slighted some of her old friends, who had once been good enough for her to know, and who would have flocked to her dance gladly. There were plenty of them scattered about between San Remo and Nice, who were at this moment feeling aggrieved by the Holbeins' neglect. If only they had been bidden, these contemptuously amused men would have had partners, even though the list of names in the society papers might have excited some derision. Mrs. Holbein had aimed high and overshot the mark. The result was tragic. And though her vulgar nature, writhing in humiliation, judged others by itself and believed all to be laughing maliciously, there were some who could not laugh.

Vanno Della Robbia detested vulgar people, and had disliked the idea of coming to the dance; but now that he was here, on their beautiful yacht, he pitied the wretched Holbeins so intensely that he felt physically ill. The man, with fiercely shining eyes and hawk nose, hunching up his round shoulders as he clenched and unclenched his pudgy hands, deeply hidden in his pockets, was horribly pathetic to Vanno, who tried not to see the little bright beads that oozed out of the tight-skinned forehead. Even more pathetic was the woman, blazing in 20,000 diamond-power, haggard under her rouged smile, her large uncovered back and breast heaving, her

fat, ungloved hands mere bunches of fingers and rings. The girl did not so much matter. She was young and handsome, her moustache as yet but the shadow of a coming event; and the affair was not so tragic to her since she had the attention of Rongier and plenty of other men. But Vanno had seen such faces and figures as those of Sam Holbein and his wife in dusky shops at Constantine. They had been happier and more at home there.

Disgustedly he knew that it comforted the woman to be talking with Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, yet he gave the comfort and spread it thickly for her by showing deference, listening patiently to desperate boastings of her splendid possessions: her house in Park Lane, the castle "Sam" had bought in Fifeshire. "I am a county lady *there*, I can tell you, Prince!" she said, with a giggle that just escaped being a sob. "I hope you will come to my ball at Dornock Castle next August, in the Games Week, your Highness; all the men in kilts and mostly with titles; our own family pipers, never less than six, playing for the reels. My daughter has taken lessons, and I tell you she can give points to some of those Calvanistic cats with Macs to their names, and a lot of rot about clans, who think just because they're Scotch they're *everybody*. Why, some of the old nobility up there have got such poor, degenerated taste in decoration, they have nasty plaid carpets and curtains all over their houses. *We* had a firm from Paris send their best men to do our castle over new from cellar to attic, Empire and

Louis. It's an example to some of those stuck-up Scotch earls and their prim countesses. If *I* had a title I'd live up to it!"

"You seem to do very well without," Vanno said.

"Well, we like to show them what's what. And I shouldn't wonder if my daughter would attract one into the family some day. But talking of titles, here comes the Viscount and Viscountess Dauntrey and that gentleman friend of theirs who may be a king any minute. There's a foreign Marquis and an Englishman with them, and some pretty girls, so maybe things will begin to wake up a bit."

Vanno turned in the direction of her glittering eyes, and saw Mary Grant approaching with a large party; three over-dressed, over-painted, over-jewelled women; the Maharajah of Indorwana, scintillating with decorations; six French officers in uniform, and eight other men. The little brown Indian royalty was walking with Mary, clinging closely to her side, seeing no one but her, and trying ostentatiously to "cut out" Dom Ferdinand, who kept almost equally near on the other side. Mary, as she waited for Lady Dauntrey to be boisterously greeted by host and hostess, smiled gently and softly from one man to the other, as if she wished to be kind to both, and was pleased with their attentions.

So, indeed, she was pleased. It was nice to be admired. Men were amusing novelties in her life. She thought them most entertaining creatures, and quaintly different in all their ways from women.

She was charmed with her own dress and the lovely filet of diamond laurel leaves which she had bought at the shop of the nice jeweller who was so kind. She had smiled and nodded to her image in the mirror before leaving the hotel, as Cinderella might have smiled; for this was her first ball. Never had she been to a dance except those got up among a few young people after dinner at Lady MacMillan's, years ago when she was only a schoolgirl, and the convent dances where the pupils had learnt to waltz together, and one of the dear sisters had played the old piano in the schoolroom.

Mary was wearing a good deal of jewellery, because she loved it, and had never had any before. Much of her winnings she had given away. Any one who asked, and made up a pitiful tale, could have something from her. The latest story going about in connection with her reckless and unreasoned generosity was of what she had done for a band of strolling Italian musicians. She had encouraged them to bleat and bawl their wornout songs in wornout voices, under the windows of the Hôtel de Paris, until it had been politely intimated to her that the shriekings and tinklings were a nuisance. Mary, who loved and understood good music, had enjoyed these disastrous efforts no more than others had, but her heart had been full of pity for the battered little band. She could not bear to have their feelings hurt; and when at last she had to tell them that they must sing no more under her window, she gave the leader and his wife a *mille* note

each to buy new instruments and costumes for the entire company. The man and woman had been seen bursting into tears, and pressing garlic kisses on Mary's hands, apparently against her inclination. Thus the story had got about, with many others of her eccentric and exaggerated charities. But beyond what she did for all who were in need, or made her think they were, she had more money than she knew what to do with for herself; and much of it she had spent with the jeweller in the Galerie Charles Trois, who was openly her slave.

If he offered her beautiful things at prices which gave him no margin of profit, she in her ignorance of values did not know that the jewels were surprisingly cheap. She bought of this man because he was kind, because he begged her to come to his place, because he seemed to enjoy showing her lovely ornaments, and knew always, as if by instinct, exactly what was most suitable and becoming. But gossip said that the jeweller made presents to the eccentric and beautiful girl whose career at Monte Carlo was an interesting mystery to every one. Vanno had heard these stories from Rongier, before he could find presence of mind to cut them short by turning to another subject: and seeing her to-night, dazzling with diamonds, surrounded by men whose admiration she evidently liked, the good thoughts of her which he had eagerly cherished were burnt up in a new flame of suspicion, a rage of jealous anger. He was furious with the girl for coming to this dance which ladies of position had ignored, fu-

rious because she had come with such people, women who painted their faces, and a crowd of men of different nations.

The two sides of his nature warred like opposing forces. The wild passion of Othello was in him. He could have snatched up the slender white-and-gold figure, wrapped the shining jewelled head in the trailing scarf of point lace, and rushed away with the girl in his arms — anywhere, far from these people who had no right to be near her. He could not bear to see the Maharajah's eyes on her face and on her long white throat. A hateful thought sprang into his mind concerning the rope of Indian pearls, with ruby and emerald tassels, tied loosely round her neck. He wondered if the Maharajah of Indorwana had given it to her, if she would have accepted such a gift from the brown man; and the thought seemed to take colour in his brain, as if it were a bright scarlet spot which grew larger and redder, spreading behind his eyes till he could see nothing else.

Vanno had told himself many times that he must not draw too near this girl; that for the sake of love's nobility, for the sake of his respect for womanhood sacred in her and in all women, he must not draw near unless her soul were a star behind the eyes that were like stars. And he had not been able to believe in the stars for more than a few happy, exalted moments, which passed and came again, only to be blotted out once more.

But now, suddenly, it no longer mattered whether

he believed or not. He had to try and tear her away from the life she was leading. He did not know which impulse was master — the impulse to save a soul, or the impulse to possess selfishly a thing coveted; at least, to snatch it from others, if he did not take it for himself.

As he stood pale and quiet in the background, Mary was accepting invitations to dance; for now Mrs. Collis and Lottie had arrived, bringing three American girls and a youthful American mother from the Hôtel Metropole, where they had gone to stay. Counting the hostess and her daughter, the number of women had been swelled to a dozen by these last arrivals, and dancing was to begin. The younger men, entering into the spirit of the occasion, struggled with each other to engage partners, and the smiling ladies were promising to split each dance between four partners.

Mary, being the prettiest girl as well as something of a celebrity, was almost alarmingly in request. She was besieged by men who begged her bodyguard to introduce them quickly, and laughing like a child she was busily giving away dances when Vanno came forward. For a moment he stood silently behind the other men, taller than any, dark and grave, and as always mysteriously reproachful, as if for some sin of Mary's which she had committed unconsciously.

She looked up, struck almost with fear by the contrast between his gravity and the frivolous gayety of the others. But he made all the rest look puerile, and even common.

"Will you dance with me?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, forgetting to add the polite "with pleasure," which years ago had been taught at the convent as the suitable reply for a débutante to a prospective partner.

"The third waltz?"

"Very well — the third waltz," she echoed.

There was no question of splitting it up. No man dared make the suggestion. Something in the Roman's manner and Mary's look gave every one the idea that they knew each other well, that no one must try to interfere between them.

XVI

Although her Roman Prince had looked so grave, Mary argued to herself that he could hardly be angry, or he would not have asked her to dance. Yet she half dreaded, half longed for the third waltz.

As a schoolgirl she had shared with Marie Grant the distinction of dancing more gracefully than any other pupil. A girl who has danced well and has a perfect ear for music does not forget; and after the first waltz on the smoothly waxed deck Mary felt as if she had been dancing every night for the last four years.

When the moment arrived, Vanno came and took her away from the Maharajah of Indorwana. He did not speak or smile, and they began at once to dance. Their steps went perfectly together, and he held her strongly, though at first he kept her at an unusual distance. Then, as though involuntarily, he drew her close, so that she could feel his heart beating like something alive, in prison, knocking to come out, and her own heart quickened. A slight giddiness made her head spin, and she asked to stop before the music sobbed itself to sleep.

"I have something I want to say to you," Vanno began. "Will you come with me where we can speak alone, without being interrupted?"

"I — I am engaged to four partners for the next dance," Mary stammered, laughing a little. She wished to hear what he had to say; she wished to stay with him, yet his voice made her afraid. And it was true that she did not like to break her promise.

"I beg that you will come with me," Vanno persisted. He did not say that he would not make her late for the others. He meant to take her away from them altogether, if he could.

"Then — I will come, for a few minutes," she consented. "But — where?"

"I will take you on the bridge," he said. "You will not be cold, for I know they've had it roofed over with flags for to-night. Mrs. Holbein told me. There will be room only for you and me, for I shall let no one else come."

Perhaps never before had Mary been so torn between two desires, except when she wished to leave the convent, yet longed to stay. Now she did not want to go on the bridge with this sombre-eyed man who spoke as if he were taking her away from the world: and yet she did want to go, far more than she wanted not to go. If anything had happened at this moment to part them, all the rest of her life she would have wondered what she had missed.

Mary knew nothing about the bridge of a vessel, or what it was for; but when she had mounted some steps she found herself on a narrow parapet walled in with canvas up to the height of her waist. Above her head was a tight-drawn canopy made of an

enormous flag; and on the white floor, wedged tightly against the canvas wall, were pots containing long rose-vines that made a drapery of leaves and flowers. Here and there folds of the great flag were looped back with wooden shields, gilded and painted with coats of arms — the crest of the Holbeins, no doubt, invented to order at great expense. These loopings were like curtains which left square, open apertures; and as Mary looked toward the shore the balmy night air brushed against her hot cheeks like cool wings.

"I don't know, I don't suppose it's possible — no, it can't be possible that it should be with you as it is with me," Vanno said, in a low voice which sounded to her ears suppressed and strange, as if he kept back some secret passion, perhaps anger. "Ever since the first moment I saw you standing on the platform of the train at Marseilles, looking down like Juliet from her balcony, I have felt as if I'd known you all my life, even before this life began, in some other existence of which you remain the only memory: you, your eyes, your smile."

Her heart bounded as sometimes the heart bounds at night, in that mysterious break between waking and sleeping, which is like a leap, and a fall over an abyss without bottom.

She wished to hold his words in her mind and dwell upon them, as if upon a suddenly opened page of some marvellous illuminated missal of priceless value. Conscious of no answer to give, or need of answer for the moment, her subconscious self never-

theless began at once to speak, and the rest of her listened, startled at first, then with wonder acknowledging the truth of her own admission.

"Why, yes," the undertone in herself answered Vanno. "It was like that with me, too, at Marseilles and afterward — as if I had known you always, as if our souls had been in the same place together before they had bodies. When you looked at me first, I felt you were like what a picture of Romeo ought to be, though I never saw a picture of Romeo, that I can remember. How strange you should have had Juliet in your mind! Yet perhaps not strange, for each may have sent a thought into the brain of the other — if such things can be."

"Such things are," Vanno answered, with passion. "In the desert where I've lived for months together, alone except for one friend, a man of the East, or an Arab servant, a voice used to say when I waked suddenly at night sometimes, that there was a woman waiting for me, whose soul and mine were not strangers, and that I should recognize her when we met."

"It is like a dream!" Mary broke in upon him, when he paused as if following a thought down some path in his mind. "As if we were dreaming now — to the music down there. Maybe we *are* dreaming. What does it all mean?"

"It means that when the world was made we were made for each other. But what has happened to us since? How have we so drifted apart? I think I have been faithful to you in my heart

always. But you? You've wandered a million miles away from me. Nothing told you to wait. You have not waited, or you would not live your life as you seem to be living it — among such men and such women. For God's sake, even if you don't care for me as things are now between us, let me take you away from all this, let me put you where you will be safe, where you can be what you were meant to be."

"I — I don't understand," Mary said, her breath coming so quickly that her words seemed stopped, and broken like water that tries to run past scattered stones.

"Don't you? Don't you understand that I love you desperately, that I can't bear my life because I love you so, and because I see you drowning? I'm telling you this in spite of myself. But I know now it had to be. I swear to you, if you'll trust me, if you'll come away with me, you shan't repent. Let me put you somewhere in a safe and beautiful place. That's all I ask. I want no more. I shall force myself to want no more."

"You — love me?" Mary repeated, still in the dream that was made of music and moonlight, the ripple of the sea and the stirring of something new in her nature of which all these sweet and beautiful things seemed part. "Love! I never thought this could happen to me."

Suddenly he caught her hands and held them so that she was forced to turn and look at him, instead of gazing out at sea and moonlight.

"Does it mean anything to you?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"Oh, a great deal," she answered. "I hardly know how much yet. It is so wonderful — so new. Yet somehow not new. I must think about it. I must ——"

It was on her lips to say "I must pray about it," but something stopped her. He was strange to her still, in spite of the miracle that was happening, and there were some thoughts which must be kept in the heart, in silence. Perhaps if she had not kept back those words, much of the future might have been different, for he must have guessed at once that, if she were sincere, his thoughts of her had been false thoughts.

"Don't stop to think. Promise me now," he cut her short.

The note of insistence in his voice frightened her, and seemed to break the music of the dream. "I can't promise!" she exclaimed. "I've never wanted to marry. It never seemed possible. I ——"

Something like a groan was forced from him. She broke off, drawing in her breath sharply. "What is the matter?" she asked. "Are you suffering?"

"Yes," he said. "I am suffering. It's my fault, for not making you understand, and yours because you haven't let me believe in you, worship you as the angel you were meant to be. I don't know what you are, but whatever you are I love you with all there is of me. Only — what I asked was — that

you'd let me take you out of this life to something better. Now don't misunderstand in another way! I'd rather die a thousand deaths than wrong you. I ask nothing from you for myself. When I knew that you were safe I'd go, and not even see you again, unless — but how can I explain that I mean only good for you, with no evil or selfishness, yet not marriage?"

"Not marriage!"

Mary wrenched her hands away, and stepped back from him. There were men, she knew, who loved women but did not marry them. She had learned this thing through the tragedy of her schoolmate, her friend, whose life had been swallowed up in mystery and darkness because men could be vile and treacherous, taking everything and giving nothing. No one save himself could have made her believe that this deep-eyed Prince was such a man.

After all, the light in which she had seen their souls together in the beginning of things had been a false light. She had never known his soul, for what she thought she knew had been very noble and splendid, and the reality was bad. It was as if she had begun to open the door of her heart, to let in a white dove, and peeping out had seen instead a vulture. She slammed the door shut; and the sweet new thing that had stirred in the depths of her nature fell back asleep or dead.

"I'm going down now," she said, in a toneless voice. "Don't come with me. I never want to speak to you again."



"'I CAN'T PROMISE!' SHE EXCLAIMED. 'I'VE NEVER WANTED TO MARRY'"

She turned away with an abrupt mechanical movement like a doll wound up to walk, but he snatched the lace scarf that was wrapped round her arm, and held her back for an instant.

"I implore you ——" he begged. Her answer was to drop the scarf, and leave it in his hands. She seemed to melt from his grasp like a snow wreath; and not daring to follow then, he was left alone on the bridge with the black and horrible ghost of his own mistake.

XVII

Mary's one thought was to escape and hide herself from every one. She felt as fastidious women feel after a journey through miles of thick black dust, when they cannot bear to have their faces seen with the disfiguring stains of travel upon them. But she had to go back to the deck where people were dancing, before she could find her way to any hiding place; and even then she did not know how she should contrive to leave the yacht without answering questions and fighting objections.

She was thankful to find Captain Hannaford not dancing, and standing near the foot of the steps she had just descended. He was some one she knew, at least, some one whose calm manner made him seem dependable. Then, too, the physical affliction which repelled her, in making him appear remote from the world of fortunate men, almost attracted her at this moment. Standing there as if waiting for her, very quiet, apparently quite unemotional, he was like a lifeboat in a merciless sea. She snatched at the help he silently offered.

"I feel ill," she said, chokingly. "Do you think I could get away without any one noticing? I want to go home."

Instinctively she was sure that she might count

upon him to serve her, that he would rather do so than stay and watch the dancing, for he himself did not dance.

"Come along," he said, with the calmness which was never ruffled. "People will think you're engaged to sit out this dance with me. Get your wraps, and I'll see that the launch is ready to take you across to the slip."

The ladies' dressing-room was below. One of the largest and finest of the staterooms had been set apart for that purpose; but there were so few cloaks that Mary had no difficulty in finding hers, half-dazed as she was. To her relief, Captain Hannaford was waiting for her not far from the door when she came out.

"I thought as you're seedy you mightn't be able to find the way alone," he said. "It's all right about the launch."

Five minutes later she was being carried toward the shore, the explosive throbbing of the engine sending stabs of pain through her temples. Beside her sat Hannaford; silent, his arms folded, his black bandaged face turned away from her. He had a habit, when he could, of seating himself so that the unscarred side of his head was in sight of the person next him; but to-night he had not done this with Mary. He knew that she would be blind not only to his defects, but to his existence, if he did not irritate her by trying to attract attention.

Neither spoke a word during the few moments of transit, and Mary gazed always toward land, as if

she did not wish to see the great lighted yacht which illuminated the whole harbour. It had not occurred to her that she ought to say, "Don't trouble to come with me. I shall do very well alone." She took it for granted not only that he would come, but that he would be glad to come; and there was no conceit in this tacit assumption. It was borne in upon her mind from his, as if by an assurance.

When the motor launch had landed them upon the slip, and puffed fussily away again, Hannaford steadied Mary's steps with a hand on her arm. It was not until they were on the pavement, and facing up the hill that leads from the Condamine to higher Monte Carlo, that she spoke. "Oh, I ought to have left word for Lady Dauntrey!" she exclaimed.

"I thought of that," Hannaford quietly answered. "I wrote on a card that you had a headache and I was taking you home."

"Thank you," Mary said, mechanically. As soon as she had heard the words she forgot them, and let her thoughts rush back to the arena of their martyrdom. Hannaford took her hand and laid it on his arm. She allowed it to rest there, depending unconsciously on the support he gave. They did not speak again until they had reached the top of the hill, turned the corner, and arrived at the steps of the Hôtel de Paris.

Because Lady Dauntrey had chosen to make a late entrance on the scene, it was after midnight now, though Mary and Hannaford had come away comparatively early from the dance. The Casino was

shut, but Christmas eve festivities were going on in the restaurant, as well as in the brilliantly lit Moorish Café de Paris on the opposite side of the *Place*. Mary's longing for peace and quiet in "coming home" was jarred out of her mind by the gay music and lights, and sounds of distant laughter which seemed to have followed her mockingly from the yacht. But they brought her out of herself; and standing on the lowest step she thanked Hannaford for all that he had done.

"You know I've done nothing," he said. "I wish there were something I really could do for you. Isn't there? Wouldn't you like to have an English doctor prescribe for your headache? I know a splendid one. He'd cure you in an hour."

"I must try to cure myself," Mary said. "I shall be better soon. I must be! There's nothing more you can do, thank you very much. Unless ——"

"Unless what?" He caught her up more quickly than he usually spoke.

"Now I've come back, I can hardly bear to go indoors after all. I feel as if I couldn't breathe in a warm room, with curtains over the windows. Would you take me on the terrace? I think I should like just to sit on one of the seats there for a few minutes; and afterward maybe I shall be more ready to go in."

"Come, then," was the brief answer that was somehow comforting to Mary. She began consciously to realize that this man's calm presence

helped her. She was grateful, and at the same time smitten with remorse for the faint physical repulsion against him she had never until now quite lost. At this moment she believed that it was entirely gone, and could never return; but she felt that she ought to atone in some way because it had once existed. She took his arm again, of her own accord, and leaned on it with a touch that expressed what she dimly meant to express — confidence in him.

They went down the flight of steps at the end of the Casino, and so to the terrace, which was completely deserted, as Mary had hoped it would be. Here, away from the golden lights of hotel and café windows, the moon had full power, a round white moon that flooded the night with silver.

They turned to walk along the terrace-front of the Casino, facing toward Italy, and away from the harbour half girdled by the Rock of Hercules. They could not see the yacht, but the great illuminated shape rode in Mary's thoughts as it rode on the water. She knew that in coming back along this way she would have to see the harbour, and *White Lady* blazing with light, pulsing with music. Just yet she could not bear that, and when they came near the eastern end of the terrace she said that she would sit down on one of the seats.

The moonlight had seemed exquisite as an angel's blessing when she looked out between the flags and rose branches, drinking in the words "I love you," as a flower drinks in dew. Now the pale radiance on the mountains was to Mary's eyes wicked, wicked

as a white witch fallen from her broomstick. All the world was wicked in its weary pallor; and the dark windows of far-off, moon-bleached villas were like staring eyeballs in gigantic skulls.

She had not meant to talk, but suddenly the fire within her flamed into words. "What have I done — what do I do — that could make people think I am — not good? — make them think they have a right to insult me?"

"Nobody has a right to think that," Hannaford answered, quietly as always. "If any man has insulted you, tell me, and I'll make him sorry."

"I — there is nothing to tell," she stammered, frightened back into reticence. "It's only — an idea that came into my head because of — something I can't explain. But, oh, do be honest with me, Captain Hannaford, if you are my friend, for I can never ask any one else, and I can never ask you again. It's just asking *itself* now, this question, for I want an answer so much. Is there anything very different about me, and the way I behave, from other girls or women — those who try to be good and nice, I mean?"

It was a strange appeal, and went to the man's heart. If Mary had puzzled him once, and if at first he had thought cynically of her, as he thought of most pretty women he met, love had washed away those thoughts many days ago: and in this moment when she turned to him for help he wondered how it was that he had ever been puzzled. He saw clearly now into the heart of the mystery, and it was a

heart of pure rose and gold, like the heart of an altar fire.

"Wait a minute," he said, "before I answer that, and let me ask *you* a question. Did you ever hear the story or see the play of Galatea?"

"No. Not that I remember. What has it to do with me?"

"I'll tell you about her, and then maybe you'll see. The story is that a Greek sculptor made a beautiful statue which he worshipped so desperately that the gods turned it into a living girl. Well, you can imagine just how much that girl knew about life, can't you? She looked grown up, and was dressed like other young women of her day, but any kitten with its eyes open was better equipped for business than she, for kittens have claws and Galatea hadn't. Naturally she made some queer mistakes, and because a rather beastly world was slow to understand perfect innocence — the pre-serpentine innocence of Eve, so to speak — a lot of injustice was done to the poor little statue come alive. Some of the people wouldn't believe that she'd ever been a statue at all."

"I see!" exclaimed Mary, sharply. Then she was silent for a moment, thinking; but at last she put a sudden question: "What happened to Galatea?"

"Oh, the poor girl was so disgusted with the world that she went back to being a statue again eventually. I think myself it was rather weak of her, and that if she'd waited a bit she might have done better."

"I'm not sure," Mary said, slowly. "To-night I feel as if there was *nothing* better — than going back and being a statue."

"You won't feel like that to-morrow. The sun brings courage. I know — by experience. You think, Miss Grant, for some reason or other — I don't even want you to tell me what, unless it would do you good to tell — that you're down in the depths. But you're not. You never can be. Where you are it will always be light, really."

"What makes you believe I am good, if others don't believe it?" She turned on him with the question, the moon carving her features in marble purity, as if Galatea were already freezing again into the coldness of a statue. The whole effect of her, in the long white cloak with its hood pulled over the shining hair, was spiritual and unearthly. Hannaford would have given his life for her, happily, just then.

"I don't know what others believe," he said. "I have seen for a long time now, almost since the first, that you were a very innocent sort of girl enjoying yourself in a new way, and losing your head over it a little. Perhaps because I've been down in the depths we talked about, and look on life differently from what I did before, I may have clearer sight. I don't know what you did or were until you came here, but I've realized to-night all of a sudden that you are absolutely a child. There is no worldly knowledge in you. You're what I said. You're Galatea."

"*You* see this, without any telling," she cried. "And yet ——" She bit her lip and kept back the words that would have rushed out, to shame her. But he knew with the unerring knowledge of one who loves, that she had nearly added: "And yet the one man who ought to understand me, does not. It is only you."

It was a bitter knowledge, but he faced it, hating the other man, who had hurt and did not deserve her. But he did not guess that the man was Prince Vanno Della Robbia. He had not heard Vanno almost commanding Mary to dance with him, and had not seen them go up on the bridge together. Hannaford was not even aware that they knew each other. The man in his mind was Dick Carleton, or possibly the Maharajah of Indorwana, whom some women found strangely attractive.

"I should like to be the one to make all others see — any fools or brutes who don't," he said.

"I don't want anybody *made* to see."

"Of course you don't. Well, there isn't one anywhere about worthy to think of you at all — not a man Jack of us — including me."

"And yet," Mary said, almost pitifully, "I have *liked* men to think about me! It's been so new, and interesting. What harm have men done me, that I should avoid them, just because they are men? Are they all so much worse than women, I wonder? Oughtn't we to be nice and sweet to them? It would seem so ungrateful to be cold, because they are so very, very kind to us. At least, that is what I felt

till now — I mean till quite lately. Men interested me, because they seemed rather mysterious, so different from us; and I wanted to find out what they were really like, for I've been with women all my life. I wish now — that is, I hope I haven't behaved in ways to make people misunderstand?"

"Only fools, as I said before."

"But — what have I done to make the fools misunderstand? You must tell me!"

"Nothing serious. Only — well, you have gone about with a queer lot sometimes."

"Men or women?"

"Madame d'Ambre, for instance."

"Yes; but I haven't talked to her for a long time now."

"You've talked to others like her, and — worse."

"Would you have me be cruel? If some of the poor, pretty creatures here aren't quite what they ought to be, because they've been badly brought up or unfortunate, would you think it right and womanly not to answer when they speak, or to turn one's back on them, or slam the Casino door in their faces, as some cross-looking people do? Wouldn't that drive them to being worse?"

It was difficult to answer this question with due regard to the laws of God and man, and at the same time give Galatea a lesson in social decorum. "I suppose," he said slowly, "you'll just have to follow your star."

"I don't see any star now worth following. Oh,

Captain Hannaford, I was so happy! It was such a beautiful, lovely world till to-night! Now I feel as if joy and luck were both gone."

"Does it comfort you a little to know that here's one man who'd do anything for you?" he asked "There never was such a friend as I'll try to be, if you'll have me."

"Thank you," Mary answered. "I shall be very glad of your friendship. I shall feel and remember it wherever I go."

"Wherever you go? You mean ——"

"Yes. I think I must go away — go on to Italy."

"If somebody has hurt you, don't go yet," Hannaford urged. "It would look as if — well, as if you felt too much. Don't you see?"

"I shouldn't like to give that impression," she said, almost primly. Then, with a change of tone, "But I can't — I won't stay at the hotel where I am. To-night at her house Lady Dauntrey invited me to come and stay there. I was asked before, to Christmas dinner. I could accept, I suppose?"

"Hm!" Hannaford grumbled, frowning. But he thought quickly, and it seemed to him that perhaps even Lady Dauntrey's chaperonage might be better than none. There was nothing against the woman, as far as he knew, except that she whitewashed her face and had strange eyes. The rich Mrs. Ernstein, who was staying at the Villa Bella Vista, was undoubtedly — even dully — respectable, if common. Neither was there any real harm

in Miss Wardropp; and poor Dauntrey did not seem to be a bad fellow at heart.

"It's not ideal there, I'm afraid," Hannaford said at last, "but for lack of a better refuge it might do."

Mary felt suddenly as if some very little thing far down in herself was struggling blindly to escape, as a fly struggles to escape when a glass tumbler has been shut over it on a table. She drew in a long, deep breath.

"I'll leave the Hôtel de Paris to-morrow," she said, as if to settle the matter with herself once and for all. "And I'll go and stay at Lady Dauntrey's."

Almost unconsciously her eyes were fixed upon the old hill town of Roquebrune, asleep under the square height of its ruined castle, which the moon streaked with silver. All the little firefly lights of the village had died out except one, which still shone "like a good deed in a naughty world."

"It is perhaps the curé's light," Mary thought; and told herself that as he was a friend of the Prince, she would never dare to go and see him now.

XVIII

Vanno stood without moving for some minutes, when Mary had gone. She had forbidden him to follow, but it was not her command which held him back. It was the command laid upon him by himself. In a light merciless as the crude glare of electricity he saw himself standing stricken, a fool who had done an unforgivable thing, a clumsy and brutal wretch who had broken a crystal vase in a sanctuary. For the blinding light showed him a new image of Mary, even as she had suddenly revealed herself to Hannaford: a perfectly innocent creature whose ways were strange as a dryad's way would be strange if transplanted from her forests into the most sophisticated colony in Europe.

Something in Vanno which knew, because it felt, had always pronounced her guiltless; but all of him that was modern and worldly had told him to distrust her. Now he was like a judge who has condemned a prisoner on circumstantial evidence, to find out the victim's innocence after the execution.

Standing there on the bridge, the dance-music troubled the current of his thoughts, rising to the surface of his mind, though he heard it without listening, like the teasing bubbles of a spring through deep water. Though he tried, he could not fully

analyze his own feelings; yet he was sharply conscious of those two conflicting sides of his nature which Angelo saw, and he could almost hear them arguing together. The part of him that was aristocrat and ascetic excused itself, asking what he could have done, better than he had done? Had he not broken his resolve for a good motive and for the girl's sake, not his own? Had he begged anything of her for himself? Ought she not to have understood that though he loved her, he could not ask her to be his wife unless or until she could prove herself worthy — not of him — but of a name and of traditions honoured in history? Ought she not to have trusted him, and seen that he was resisting temptation, not yielding to it, when he implored her to take his help and friendship?

Already Angelo had disappointed their father, by marrying a girl of whom no one knew anything except her beauty and talent as an artist. Marie Gaunt had come to Rome to paint the portrait of a fashionable woman; had been "taken up" by other *mondaines;* and Angelo, meeting her at a dinner, had fallen in love with and followed her to Dresden, where she lived and had made her reputation as an artist. In spite of the Duke's objections they had married; and Vanno, who was his father's favourite, surely owed some duty to the old man who loved him. At worst, Marie Gaunt the artist had in no way laid herself open to gossip. According to what friends had written from Rome, she was more than discreet, demure as a Puritan maiden, and the

elderly chaperon who travelled with her was a dragon of virtue. With this girl whom Vanno had met at Monte Carlo it was different. She was not discreet. Whatever else she might be, she was not Puritan. She was gossiped about on all sides, and gayly fed the fire of gossip by appearing in startling dresses, by doing startling things, and picking up extraordinary acquaintances. Even as far away as Mentone and Nice she was talked about. Two women had started some story about her travelling to Paris with a French artist; and the man himself, who had arrived since, had made a fool of himself at the Casino, and apparently tried to blackmail her. She was said to have given him money. No love, no matter how great, could justify Prince Giovanni Della Robbia in making such a girl his wife while uncertain of the truth which underlay her amazing eccentricities, and the gossip which followed her everywhere, like a dog that barked at her heels.

This was what one side of him protested anxiously to the other side, which in turn raged against it and its cold plausibilities. The side which was all passion and romance and high chivalry lashed its enemy with contempt, and evil epithets of which the hardest to bear was "prig." For no man can endure being thought a prig, even by himself.

"You, who said that her soul was meant for yours, and the next moment distrusted it!" he reproached himself in bitterness. "What a fool — what a hypocrite! If you've known her since the beginning of things, you should have known by instinct what

she was, down under the surface frivolities and foolishnesses, mistakes any untaught girl might make."

This Vanno, who was all man and not prince, said that no punishment could be too severe for one who doubts where he loves. He saw himself justly punished now, by learning Mary's truth through her noble indignation. Because he had waited for this proof he acknowledged that he had sinned beyond most women's pardon; yet he meant to win hers. He cared more for her than before, and determined that he would never give her up; yet all the while that other, worldly Vanno, who was prince as well as man, held stiffly back. How could one whose small knowledge of women good and bad came mostly through hearsay be sure of a woman?

His one boyish venture in love he saw now had been in shallow water; but it had not tended to strengthen his faith in the innate nobility of women. On the contrary, it had shown him that a woman who seemed sweet and loving could be hard and calculating, even mercenary. Innocence being a charming pose, why should it not be adopted by the cleverest actresses, professional sirens, specialists in enchantment, who wished to be admired by all men, even men for whom they cared nothing? How could he tell even now that this girl was not a clever actress who judged him well and planned to lead him on?

So he asked himself questions, and answered in rage, only to begin again, fiercely breaking down one set of arguments and building up another.

It was the arrival of Dodo Wardropp with Dom Ferdinand on the bridge which drove him away and out of himself sufficiently to bid his host and hostess good-night.

When the motor launch had taken him ashore, the impulse was very strong in him to go up to Roquebrune and tell the curé what had happened. He knew that his friend kept a light burning all night in a window, and he could see it, as Mary had seen it, sending out its message for any who needed help. Yet what good could come of talking to one who had never met the girl? Fate had kept the two apart, for some reason, and Vanno could but consult his own heart. Its counsel was to write to Mary, explaining all those things that she had not let him explain in words.

This matter of explanation seemed easier than it proved. Letter after letter had to be torn up before Vanno was able to express on paper anything at all which she might understand, which might soften her to forgiveness. Even then he was dissatisfied; but something had to stand, something had to go. "Write me at least one line," he ended, "if only to say that you know I did not mean to insult you, in the way you thought when you left me."

Mary was still "Miss M. Grant" to him, and so he addressed his letter. Dawn had put the stars to sleep when he sealed the envelope, and he had to wait for a reasonable hour before sending to her room; but he did not go to bed, or try to sleep.

"Christmas!" he said to himself, aloud. "The day of peace on earth and good will toward men. If she remembers, can she refuse to forgive me?"

At half-past eight he thought it might be taken for granted that she was awake. "Don't ask for an answer," he told the young waiter to whom he gave his sealed envelope, and the lace scarf which Mary had left in his hands. "Say only that you're not sure whether there is an answer or not, and you will wait to see."

Vanno had hoped the servant might be away a long time, as delay would mean that Mary was taking time to think, and writing a reply. But in less than ten minutes the man was at the door again.

"The lady was in, and when I gave her the scarf and letter, asked me who had sent them," was the report. "I told her it was his Highness the Roman Prince, staying in the hotel. Then she said, 'This scarf is mine, but the letter must have been sent by mistake, as I do not know his Highness.' So I have brought it back, as the lady desired. I hope I have done right?"

"Quite right, thank you," Vanno returned mechanically, and took his own letter. His ears tingled as though Mary's little fingers had boxed them. If she had but known, she was more than revenged upon him for the snub which had clouded her first dinner in the restaurant of the Hôtel de Paris.

For a moment Vanno was intensely angry, because she had dared to humiliate him in the eyes of

a servant; but by and by, when his ears stopped tingling, he told himself that he deserved even this. He respected her all the more, and no longer feared that she might be a clever actress trying to lead him on. A woman who wished to attract a man would not use so sharp a weapon.

Still, Vanno had no thought of giving up. If she would not read his explanation she must hear it, and justify him in one way, even if she would not forgive. He hoped to see her at luncheon time, but she did not come into the restaurant. Again, at dinner she was absent. A merry little Christmas party of four sat at her table: an English duke and duchess, a great Russian dancer, a general of world-wide fame.

"Where is the lady who usually sits opposite?" he asked of his waiter, draining his voice of all expression. "Is she away for Christmas?'

"She is away altogether," answered the waiter. "She left before luncheon."

"Left altogether — left before luncheon!" Vanno echoed, almost stupidly, forgetting to appear indifferent.

"I believe she is still in Monte Carlo," the man went on, delighted to give information. "I do not know where, but I can no doubt find out for your Highness."

"No, thanks, I won't trouble you," Vanno replied hurriedly. He would not learn her whereabouts from a servant, but would find out for himself Where could she be? To whom could she have gone? The uncertainty was unbearable. If it

were true that she was still in Monte Carlo, she would probably be in the Casino this evening. Vanno had not gone there often, after the first night or two, for he hated to see Mary in the Rooms alone, playing a game which attracted crowds, and caused people of all sorts to talk about her. Now, however, he finished his dinner quickly, and went immediately to the Casino.

It was just nine o'clock, and though it was Christmas the crowd was as great as ever, even greater than he had seen it before. Vanno walked through the Salle Schmidt, where Mary usually played, stopping at each table long enough to make sure that she was not there. Then he passed on into the newer rooms lit by those hanging lights which Mary had thought like diamond necklaces of giantesses. The three life-size figuers of the eccentric yet decorative picture, nicknamed "The Disgraces," seemed to follow him mockingly with langorous eyes, whispering to each other, "Here comes a fool who does not understand women."

Mary was not playing at any of the tables in these rooms; but there was hope still. The Sporting Club had now opened for the season, and it was more fashionable at night even than the Casino. Vanno had walked through once or twice, after midnight when the Casino had shut, and found there a scene of great beauty and animation: the prettiest women in Monte Carlo, wearing wonderful dresses and jewels, and famous men of nearly all the countries of the world, princes and politicians, great soldiers

and grave judges, and even one or two travelling kings. It was very likely that Miss Grant would have gone on to the Sporting Club, after dinner with friends on Christmas Day.

He went across the road and a little down the hill, where the white clubhouse owned by the Casino blazed with light. But as he reached it, Dick Carleton dashed through the door, began running down the steps, and almost cannoned into him.

"Beg pardon, Prince," he exclaimed. "I've just been told that a friend of mine's losing like the dickens, in the *Cercle Privè*, and I'm going to dart across and take out my subscription. I've never done it yet. But it will be worth the hundred francs to stop her, if I can."

"Is it Miss Grant?" Vanno did not deliberately put the question, but heard himself asking it.

"Why, yes it is," Carleton admitted. "Have you been in — have you seen her?"

"No. But I felt somehow that you were speaking of Miss Grant."

"I thought you scarcely knew her," Dick caught him up, jealously.

"You are right. I — scarcely know her. But one has intuitions sometimes. I must have had one then. So — she is losing? I heard she had wonderful luck."

"She has had, up till now. Seemed as if she couldn't lose. Christmas night, too! Isn't it a shame?" And Dick was off, hatless, in evening dress without an overcoat. Vanno stood still in

front of the Sporting Club for a moment, watching the slim boyish figure go striding up the hill. A liveried porter, seeing the Prince at the foot of the steps, obsequiously opened the door, but Vanno made a sign that he did not wish to enter. As soon as Dick had disappeared, Vanno followed him.

As he went seldom to the Casino, he had not taken a subscription to the newest rooms, or *Cercle Privè*, where the price of admission is a hundred francs. These rooms are for ardent gamblers who dislike playing in a crowd, and Vanno, who had not felt inclined to play at all, scarcely remembered their existence. Now he bought a ticket, however, and having written his name upon it, followed Carleton at a little distance, to a door at the far end of the trente et quarante rooms. His heart was beating heavily, for in a few minutes he would perhaps know to whom Mary had gone when she left the Hôtel de Paris.

XIX

Even the new rooms were crowded, and preoccupied as he was, it struck Vanno oddly, as it always did strike him anew in the Casino, to hear every one who passed talking of the all-absorbing game. They were obsessed by it, and threw questions to each other, which elsewhere would have meant nothing, or some very different thing; but here no explanations were needed. "Doing any good?" asked a pallid young man with a twitching face, like that of a galvanized corpse, as he met a weary-eyed woman in mourning, whose bare hands glittered with rings. "No," she answered peevishly. "You never saw such tables — all running to intermittences. Nobody can do anything, except the old man who lives on two-one." Then the pair began speaking of Miss Grant, for her name was common property. She was one of the celebrities of the season.

Vanno went on, pausing at each table in the immense Empire room, whose pale green walls glittered with Buonaparte's golden bees; and everywhere he heard the same questions: "How are you doing? Tables treating you well?" Or, "Have you seen Miss Grant? She's simply throwing away money to-night. I'm afraid her luck's out."

There was something ominous and fatal in these words, repeated again and again, with variations. "Poor Miss Grant! Her luck is out." All these gamblers discussing her affairs, commenting, criticising, bewailing the end of her long run of luck. The idea came to Vanno that it was like a chanting chorus in a Greek tragedy; but he thrust the thought out of his mind with violence. He could not bear to associate Mary with tragedy. She was not made for a life and a place like this, where pain and passion and heartburning lie in sharp contrast of shadow side by side with sunshine and flowers. Vanno would have liked to spirit her away out of this garden of painted lilies, to a sweet, old-fashioned garden where pure white Madonna lilies lined the quiet paths. If only she had listened to him last night, how different might have been her Christmas day and his!

Presently he saw Dick Carleton, standing on the outer edge of a crowd which had collected round one of the tables farthest from the entrance. He was peering over people's heads, frowning, his hands deep in his pockets. Then Vanno knew that he need look no farther for Mary.

He was taller than Dick, and almost pushing his way to a place, he saw Mary seated at the opposite side of the table. She sat at the left of a croupier, who was helping her to place her numerous stakes. Beside her was Lady Dauntrey, and behind her chair, tall and pale and very haggard, Lord Dauntrey stood. Vanno guessed, with a mingling of

relief and regret, that Mary must have gone to live at the Villa Bella Vista.

The ball spun round, rested in the pocket of number 11, and all Mary's stakes were swept away.

"That's the eighth time in succession she's lost maximums round twenty-four," mumbled a man close to Vanno's shoulder, in a young, weak voice.

"She deserves it, for being an idiot," petulantly replied a woman, in French, though the man had spoken in English. "I was her mascotte. I showed her how to play and how to win; but I was not good enough for her when she began making grand friends. Some women are so disloyal! She has hurt me to the heart."

Vanno glanced down impatiently, and saw the woman who had been with Mary on her first night at the Casino. He remembered the faded, white-rose face, with its peevish crumples that were not yet lines, and the false little smile that tried to draw attention away from them. He noticed that she was no longer shabby, but wore a smart new dress and hat, with a huge boa of ostrich feathers half covering her thin, bare neck. There was a glint of jewels about her as she moved. The man with the young, weak voice gazed at her admiringly, with a half-pitiful, half-comic air of pride in being seen with so *chic* a creature.

"Never you mind. We men ain't disloyal, anyhow," he consoled her. She smiled at him pathetically, and his pale blue eyes, like those of a faded

Dresden china shepherd, returned her look with ecstasy.

"That wretched boy will marry the woman," was the thought that jumped into Vanno's mind. He recognized the insignificant face, with its receding chin and forehead, as that of a very young baronet, the last of a degenerate family, weak of intellect, strong only in his craze for jewels and horses. He had been in love with two or three English girls, and one noted American beauty, but all, though comparatively poor, had refused him, saying that one "must draw the line somewhere, and he was the limit." Madeleine d'Ambre would not be fastidious. The brief revelation, like something seen in the flare of a match that quickly dies out, struck Vanno with pity and disgust. But a youth of this calibre was sure sooner or later to drift to Monte Carlo; and perhaps the Frenchwoman's leading strings would be better for him than none.

Again the wheel spun round, and Mary lost several piles of gold and notes. It seemed to Vanno that she was changed not only in expression, but even in features. The outline of her face looked sharper, thinner, less girlish. Her eyes, very wide open, were bright, but not with their own happy brightness, like a reflection of sunlight. They were more like thick glass through which a fire can be seen dimly burning: and she looked astonished, piteous, as a child looks when it has been seized and whipped for a fault committed in ignorance. She seemed to be saying to herself dazedly, "What has

happened to me? Why should I be punished?" High on each cheek burned a round spot of bright rose colour.

Sometimes Lady Dauntrey spoke to her, and Lord Dauntrey bent down and appeared to advise. At first Mary shook her head, with a quivering smile; but when the piles of money continued to be swept away, she lost confidence in herself, and accepted their suggestions. Evidently she tried to follow the new plan of action, whatever it was, but her luck did not change for the better. Almost invariably her stakes, no matter where placed, were taken from her. Even the croupiers looked surprised. From time to time they darted at her glances of interest.

A great longing to be near, to protect her with love and sympathy, rushed over Vanno. He forgot that she was angry with him, or that he had given her cause for anger. He remembered only his love, and the instinctive knowledge he had in spite of all, that her heart was for him. He felt, unreasonably yet intensely, that if he were to sit at the table where she could see him and receive the magnetic current of his love, she would come to herself; that she would stop fighting this demon of misfortune; that she would be filled with strength and comfort, and would know what was best to do.

As if moved by the force of Vanno's will, a man got up from a chair directly in front. It was Captain Hannaford, who looked less impassive than usual. His somewhat secretive face was flushed, and he

was frowning. Without appearing to see the Prince, or Dick Carleton, who was on the point of speaking, he walked quickly away from the table as if anxious to escape. Almost savagely, Vanno grasped the back of the chair and flung himself into it, though Madeleine d'Ambre had been on the point of sitting down. A moment later Hannaford strolled back, having changed his mind for some reason; but Vanno had already forgotten him. He remembered only Mary, for she had glanced up for an instant, and their eyes had met, his imploring, hers startled, then hastily averted.

Hannaford stood shoulder to shoulder with Carleton, who nodded and spoke. "I wish we could get her to stop! I've tried — came over from the Sporting Club on purpose, but she won't listen to me."

"We can't do anything with her at the table," said Hannaford.

"Norwood told me she was losing a lot, and I ran across from the Sporting Club," Dick went on. "No good, I suppose, as you say. One can't keep whispering a stream of good advice down the back of people's necks. Only a very special kind of an ass tries that twice: but still, I did hope —— "

"Yes, there's that 'but still' feeling, isn't there?" Hannaford smiled his tired smile, that never brightened. "I was going to cut it, because she was getting on my nerves a bit. But I've come back to hang around, as you're doing, and try the effect of will power, though I'm afraid it won't work."

"It seems a vile table," Dick remarked.

"It's got a grudge against Miss Grant apparently, but it was all right for me till I began to get nervy, watching her lose."

"You won?"

"Yes, and felt a beast — as if I were taking her money. Whenever I was on one colour, she seemed always to choose a number on the other. I've got enough money to buy my villa now, thanks to this night's work; so I shall consider it a Christmas gift from the dear old Casino."

"Hurrah!" said Dick, his eyes always on the table and Mary's play. "I'm glad some one's in luck, anyhow." He had heard from Rose Winter, and from Hannaford himself, of the negotiations for Madame Rachel Berenger's place just across the Italian frontier. Every one knew of her wild play at the Casino and of her losses, which were now so great that she wished to sell the old château which she had bought after her retirement from the stage; and Hannaford's friends were aware that for some months he had been quietly bargaining for it. His ambition was to buy the place out of his winnings, but until to-night they had not reached the price asked by the old actress. Twenty years ago she had paid two hundred thousand francs for the huge house, almost in ruin. Later she had spent nearly as much again in restoring it, and creating a garden which for a while had been the marvel of the coast. Long ago, however, it had gone back to wilderness. The splendid furniture imported by

Madame Berenger from the palace of an impoverished Bourbon princess had lost its gilding and its rich brocade of silk and velvet. Two discouraged servants remained with her, out of a staff of twelve. Once there had been ten gardeners; now there was none; and the one hope left for this lost palace of sleep was in a new ownership. The whole place smelt of decay and desolation, yet to Hannaford it was more attractive than such a beautiful and prosperous domain as Schuyler's Stellamare. The sad loveliness of the old house and the old garden made a special appeal to him. He wanted to save the Château Lontana from ruin, and felt superstitiously that the interest he would find in such a task might redeem him from the desolation which, like a high wall, rose between him and life.

Something of this feeling Mrs. Winter had gathered from Hannaford, though he had never put it in words, and Dick knew she would be glad of tonight's news. It was no secret that Madame Berenger had refused to accept less than three hundred thousand francs; therefore Dick sprang to the conclusion that this must be the sum of Hannaford's winnings.

"I congratulate you heartily," he said. "My cousin will be delighted. She likes you, and has been interested about the Château Lontana."

"She's been very kind and sympathetic. No wonder everybody loves her! I know what she'll want to say now, even if she doesn't say it. 'Pay for your château, and play no more.' Well, if you

see her sooner than I do, please tell Mrs. Winter I'm going to take her advice before I get it — to a certain extent. Not a louis do I risk till the place is mine. Then — perhaps I'll follow my luck, and try to make the Casino help me restore the house and garden. Not that I want to do much, only enough to make the place habitable, and give the flowers a chance to breathe."

"Then you mean to live there?"

"For a while at all events. Perhaps not long. Who knows what one may do? But I shall have the pleasure of knowing it's mine."

Dick, though interested, had fallen into absent-mindedness. Two or three persons having slipped away, he was able to get nearer the table, and to see more clearly what Mary was doing. It almost seemed that if he and Hannaford concentrated their whole minds upon willing her to stop play for the night, she must feel the influence. Her luck was out, certainly. She had lost a great deal, but she had a goodly store of winnings to fall back upon.

"Let's will her hard, to leave off," he suggested, half ashamed of the proposal, yet secretly in earnest.

Hannaford smiled indulgence. "All right," he said. "Here goes!"

Vanno Della Robbia less deliberately yet with more ardour had thrown himself into the same experiment. He thought that Mary's anger against him might have one good result: in making her wish to leave the table where he had come to sit. She could scarcely fall upon worse luck elsewhere,

and perhaps she might give up play for the evening if she went away from this unlucky corner. If a wish of his could be granted by fate, she would never play again. Yet, desiring this with all the force that was in him, he began nevertheless to gamble, for the first time since coming to Monte Carlo. No conscientious scruple had held him back hitherto; but the game had not appealed to him. He disliked the crowding, the sordidness and vulgarity which, to his mind, attended it; and it seemed to him that public gambling was an unintelligent, greedy vice.

His idea in putting on money now was merely to "pay for his place," whence he did not mean to move as long as Mary stayed. Many other men would be ready to snatch the chair the instant he abandoned it, therefore he had no right to usurp the Casino's property without payment. He had no small money with him, and to avoid the trouble of changing notes with a croupier, he staked a hundred francs on red, the colour of the number which Lord Dauntrey had just advised Mary to choose.

As if she fully realized that her luck had failed her to-night, for several spins she had been guided entirely by Lord Dauntrey. He was directing her play according to his system, to which his faith still desperately clung, though he now admitted to his friends that his own capital was not big enough to test it fairly. His game was upon numbers, columns, and dozens, all at the same time, increas-

ing the stakes, as he said, "with the bank's money," or, in other words, after a win. It was therefore a loss following directly upon a win which was the worst enemy of the system, and occasionally there came a long run of exactly this alternation: win, loss, win, loss, win, loss. It happened so to-night, greatly to his annoyance, as he hoped to interest Miss Grant in his method. Dom Ferdinand was sulkily waiting for more remittances, and amusing himself meanwhile by throwing about a few louis here and there, undirected by his friend Lord Dauntrey. The Marquis de Casablanca had stopped play entirely, perhaps in the hope of setting his patron a wise example. The Collises had never been useful. Dodo Wardropp liked to gamble "on her own," and Mrs. Ernstein, though rich, was a coward when it came to risking her money at the tables. Others in the house made themselves as irritating to Lord Dauntrey in their selfish obstinacy as Dodo; and all his hopes centred upon Mary. She was a lamb whom his wife had cleverly caught in the bushes, a lamb with golden fleece. He would have liked above all things to help her win this first night; but curiously enough she lost monotonously, no matter what game she tried, unless Prince Giovanni Della Robbia pushed money on to some chance where her stake happened to lie. Then and then only she won; so that if she inclined to superstition (as did most women at the tables) she would believe that not Lord Dauntrey but the Roman "brought her luck." Nevertheless she

seemed vexed rather than pleased when the Prince (whom Dauntrey knew by sight and name) fixed upon a chance where she had staked. Presently, though she won four times running when this occurred, she kept back her money until the last, staking only just before the croupier's "Rien ne va plus," to prevent Della Robbia from following her lead. At last, she got up impatiently. "I am tired!" she said, in a voice that trembled slightly. "I hardly know what I'm doing."

Mary did not pick up the money — comparatively little — which was the remnant of her losses, and Dauntrey asked sympathetically if she would like him to play for her, according to the plan they had begun to follow out.

"Yes, if you please," she replied, seeming to attach no importance to her answer or to the small pile of gold and notes, all that remained of a hundred thousand francs with which she had begun the evening.

Without another glance at the table, or a flicker of the lashes at Vanno, she turned away; and after a whispered word or two in Lord Dauntrey's ear, Eve went with her, in the direction of the Salle Schmidt.

Vanno had an immediate impulse to rise, but common sense forbade. Mary had so unmistakably shown her dislike of his presence, and the association of his play with hers, that it was impossible for him to follow her. Though he detested Lady Dauntrey, in his heart he preferred her to a

man as a companion for Mary, even a man like Dick Carleton; and for the moment the jealousy he could not control was at rest. Seeing that Lord Dauntrey's weary eyes were fixed upon him, he continued to play, as if he had not noticed Mary's going. By and by the game began to absorb him in a way he would not have believed possible. He became excited, with an odd, tense excitement which had an almost fierce joy in it. Never before had he felt an emotion exactly like this, except once, when in India he and a friend had lain in wait for a man-eating tiger, in the night, at the tiger's drinking place. Dimly it amused him to compare this sensation with the other; and it surprised him, too, that he should feel as he felt now; for gambling had always seemed to him not only greedy and sordid and vulgar, but a stupid way of passing the time, unworthy a man or woman of sense and breeding.

To his own amazement, the pleasure of the game was balm for the heartache Mary had made him suffer. He did not forget her, or his repentance, or the determination to right himself in her eyes; yet the hot throb of his anxiety was soothed, as by an opiate. What he felt for Mary was but a part of this keen emotion that flowed through him like a tide.

He remembered the prophecy of his friend the astrologer, in the Libyan desert, that his star in the ascendant would bring him good fortune this month of December. Certainly he had not found luck in love. Perhaps it was to come to him through

gambling. He wondered if there could be any possible connection between the stars and the actions of a man, or the chances of a game like roulette. Though his studies of the stars had been confined to astronomy, the romance in him, and the dreamer's love of mystery, refused to shut the door on belief in another branch of the same science. It was enormously interesting to think that perhaps the stars, the planets, controlled this tiny sphere of ivory in its mad dash round the revolving wheel. Since the whole universe was made up of marvels almost beyond credence, who with certainty could say "no?"

Vanno was not rich. He had no more than thirty thousand francs a year, left him by his mother, and had refused an extra allowance from the Duke. It had been his pride to live within his income, all through his travels, and despite his love of collecting rare books. His father had given him his observatory at Monte Della Robbia, but nothing else of importance. His invention was beginning to bring him in a little, but it would never make a fortune; and he was not one who could afford a "flutter" at Monte Carlo without counting the cost. To-night, however, after winning some thousands of francs, it did not occur to him — as it might if some other man in his circumstances had been concerned — that it would be wise to stop. The spin of the wheel began to exert a fascination over his mind, appealing to all that was adventurous in him. Not once was he conscious of putting on a stake for the sake of the

money it might gain; not once did he hesitate from fear of loss. It was the call of the unknown that lured him, the thrilling doubt as to where the ball would stop.

The little dancing white thing, magical as a silver bullet, seemed a miniature incarnation of destiny, spinning his fate. Always Vanno was pricked by the desire to try again, and see if he could once more foretell the result. There lay the poignant, the indescribable charm: in not knowing.

He saw now that he had misjudged gamblers in believing them all to be mercenary, at least at the moment of gambling. Some might be so, many perhaps; but he began to realize that the chief appeal was to the imaginative temperament, such as he knew his own, and guessed Mary's, to be.

When his stake was larger than usual — larger a good deal than he could afford in prudence — he revelled in the uncertainty of the event which he intensely desired. And it dawned in his mind that this was the true intoxication of the gambler, the delicious anguish of playing with the unknown. It was a more dangerous intoxication than he had supposed it to be, because more subtle, as the effect of cocaine or morphia is more insidious than that of alcohol.

Like a hunter, he pursued the game until, to his great surprise, a croupier announced, "Les trois derniers." It was almost impossible to believe that he had sat at the table for hours.

By this time Vanno had abandoned all attempt

to check his winnings and losses. It was not until he had gathered up his money and counted it on leaving the table that he knew he had lost not only his winnings, but three thousand francs besides. The discovery filled him with a peculiar, bitter annoyance, as if an alkaloid fluid ran through his veins: and this not because of the loss, which was comparatively insignificant, but because he had failed, because he had been ignominiously beaten by the bank. He had had his luck, and had stupidly thrown it away, after the manner of all those fools for whom he had felt a superior, pitying contempt. Still, he was not sorry that he had played. His short experience of roulette and the curious exhilaration the spin of the wheel had given brought him nearer to understanding Mary than he had ever come before, or could have come otherwise. Also, his combativeness was roused. His nerves seemed to quiver, to bristle with an angry determination to justify himself in his own eyes, and to have his revenge upon the brutal power of the bank.

"I'll get it all back from them to-morrow," he thought, "and more besides. I won't be beaten. And when I've done something worth doing, I'll stop. That's the way to gamble."

XX

Mary was not comfortable at the Dauntreys', and the house depressed her; but it was a refuge from the Hôtel de Paris, where Prince Giovanni Della Robbia was; and Lady Dauntrey was so kind, so affectionate, that Mary felt it her duty to be grateful. Almost strangers as they were, her hostess poured into her ears a great many intimate confidences, and asked her guest's advice as well as sympathy. Mary was touched by this, for Lady Dauntrey seemed a strong woman; and, besides, the slight put upon her by Vanno had left a raw wound which appreciation from others helped superficially to heal. She had been so openly admired and flattered at Monte Carlo that vanity had blossomed in her nature like a quick-growing flower, though she had no idea that she had become vain. Men looked at her with the look which is a tribute from the whole sex. She could hardly bear it that the One Man should disapprove.

Those impecunious painters who haunt the open-air restaurants at Monte Carlo, on the chance of selling a five-minute portrait, had buzzed round her like bees round a honey-pot, but they were not the only ones. Two artists of some renown had got themselves introduced through acquaintances the

Casino had given her, and begged her to sit to them. Also it was true, as gossip said, that the artist she had met in the train had arrived, and hastened to renew the acquaintance. He had painted her portrait. She had paid for it and — burnt it. She, the quiet schoolgirl, the earnest postulant, the novice who had never thought of her own face, who for a year had not seen it in a mirror or missed the sight of it, knew herself now for a beauty, a charming figure of importance in this strange, concrete little world where Hercules entertained his guests. And then, to be despised by the one person who occupied her thoughts, despised and thrust away at the very moment when he confessed to loving her! It was a blow to the woman's pride which had not consciously stooped to unworthiness, and a still sharper hurt to her new vanity.

She wanted to show Vanno, if he still thought of her, that others burned incense to her beauty, though he had not placed her on an altar. The discomforts of the Villa Bella Vista mattered little to the girl who had gone through a hard novitiate in a Scotch convent. She made her own bed and dusted her room. She did not care what she ate; and she tried to throw her whole heart into the life of the household, that amazing household which was unlike anything she could have imagined out of a disordered dream.

Always after coming to the Dauntreys' she continued to lose at the Casino, often large sums, occasionally picking up a little, as if luck hovered near,

awaiting its cue to return, only to be frightened away again. But after a few days' time, in which more than two hundred thousand francs slipped through her fingers, Lady Dauntrey suggested that Miss Grant should "rest" for a while, meantime letting Dauntrey play his system for her benefit and with her capital. This idea did not amuse Mary.

The "gambler's blood," of which she had been warned by her father, warmed to the excitement of the game. She craved this excitement, and felt lost without it, now that the interest of Prince Vanno's distant presence in her life was gone. Still, she could not bring herself to refuse an offer which seemed meant in kindness. She gave Lord Dauntrey one thousand louis, the smallest capital, he explained, necessary to exploit his system with five-franc pieces at roulette. He assured her that with pleasure he would add this money to the same sum of his own, and play for her as well as himself, the syndicate he had originally formed being now dissolved. Dodo hinted that operations had been stopped because the whole capital was lost, but Lord Dauntrey had already mentioned to Mary that a few slight reverses had frightened the "shareholders." This cowardice, he said, had so disgusted him that he had given back the capital to each one intact, and politely refused to play any longer for the syndicate. A position of such responsibility was only possible if he were upheld by the confidence of all concerned. Otherwise, he preferred to gamble only for himself, or for a personal friend or two who trusted him.

Each night, after Mary placed her thousand louis in his hands, Lord Dauntrey gave her five hundred francs. This was as high a percentage, he made clear to her, as could be got out of the capital except at a risk of heavy losses, and he "did not care to run big risks for a woman." On a thousand louis, Lord Dauntrey explained, five hundred francs profit nightly represented 900 per cent. a year, which was of course enormous; and regarded thus, her risk was an investment, not a speculation.

When some of Lady Dauntrey's bright particular stars left her firmament (as they did leave occasionally with the quick flight of comets) she hastened to fill the vacancies with any small luminaries available. The Villa Bella Vista remained full, even when Mrs. Ernstein went suddenly to Cannes, where "villa life" might be considered even more aristocratic than at "Monte"; and Dom Ferdinand took himself and his ally out of danger's way when Dodo refused to understand that only flirtation, not marriage, was possible with a "commoner." The price of Dauntrey hospitality had, however, fallen. Those who could be attracted by the bait of their barren title had now to be looked for low in the social scale: and it was difficult to get eligible *partis* with whom to dazzle heiresses. The slender Austrian count, whom Dodo scornfully pronounced a "don't count," vanished mysteriously soon after Mary's arrival. He did not even say goodbye; and Dodo, who vowed that she had often heard him groaning behind the thin partition which divided

her room from his, went whispering about the house that he had committed suicide in the Casino gardens.

"Why not?" she argued almost convulsively, when Mary protested that surely such a dreadful thing could not have been kept secret. "Would the Dauntreys tell, if they knew? No, of course they'd hush it up, and get rid of anything he'd left — in one way or another. Not that there was much to get rid of, for the Mont de Pieté was a kind of home from home for the Count. He used to run back and forth between there and the Casino, like a distracted rabbit: pawn his watch; play with the money; win; race back and get his watch; lose again; and so on a dozen times a day, till he was stripped of jewellery down to his studs and collar buttons. It all came from his obstinacy in believing that the croupiers at trente et quarante were signalling to him whether it was going to be *inverse* or *couleur*, when they were really only licking their thumbs to deal the cards better! *I* say, if you must have a fetish, have a reasonable one, like playing for neighbours of zero at roulette. But that silly boy thought himself too smart for roulette, and he wouldn't take any advice, so this is what comes of it. I feel in my bones that *his* are in the suicide's cemetery this minute. Has nobody told you that there are no inquests of coroners here in this principality? And a jolly good thing, too! Why make the rest of us gloomy by putting nasty details in the papers, when we've come here to enjoy ourselves? *They* don't ask

people to gamble, they merely make it nice for 'em if they're determined to, and anyhow it's honest gambling. They don't want you to play if you can't afford it and are going to be an idiot, because they hate rows and scandal. It's all for *our* benefit! If a man's cad enough to blow his brains out at the tables, all over a lady's dress, he is whisked away so quick nobody has time to realize what's up before a glass door in the wall has opened with a spring and shut again as if nothing had happened. Not a croupier stops spinning. I call it magnificent. But it does make you feel a bit creepy when anybody you've known disappears into space!"

Lord Burden, the dilapidated earl imported as a *parti,* was of opinion that the Austrian count had merely applied for the *viatique;* and being granted by the management a sum large enough to pay his fare and his food, had departed without caring to show his face again at the villa. Others were inclined to agree with Dodo, especially the women, who were of the type that secretly enjoys mystery and horror, when unconnected with themselves. No one ever really knew, however (unless perhaps the Dauntreys), what had become of the youth with hair *en brosse,* and wasp waist so slim that the body seemed held together by a mere ligament. He was gone: that was all, and his small place in the household was more than filled by a German couple, an ex-officer with an adoring wife, both of whom spent half their days in bed, testing on a roulette watch various exciting systems which, now they had

come from afar off, they lacked courage to play at the Casino. Their name was so intricate that Dodo Wardropp said it ought to be kept a secret. As nobody could pronounce it, however, it amounted to that, in the end.

They did not stay long; and indeed, after the disappearance of the Austrian count, a microbe pricking people to departure seemed to multiply in the Villa Bella Vista. The sailor went suddenly, on receipt of a letter from the Admiralty, that prying institution having learned and disapproved of the way in which he was spending his leave and his pay. Lord Burden followed Mrs. Ernstein to Cannes; and Dodo, who never ceased to want good value for her money, was bitterly dissatisfied with the unmarried men who remained.

The principal one had at first attracted not only Dodo but every other woman, with the exception of Mary. He spoke English well, yet appeared to be equally at home in all socially useful languages. He looked like a Russian, dressed like a Frenchman, claimed to have estates in Italy, copper mines in Spain, a shooting in Hungary, and told delightful anecdotes of his intimate friendship with most existing sovereigns. Not a king or queen of any standing but — according to him — came often to his "little place" in this country or that, and addressed him as "Dear Alfred." His manner, his voice, were so smooth that they oiled the creaking wheels of life at the villa; and his stories, told at the table, distracted guests' attention from

the skeleton at the feast — a premature skeleton of a once muscular chicken, or a lamb that had seen its second childhood. Unfortunately, however, a journalist who knew everybody and everything in the world was brought in to luncheon by Lord Dauntrey one day, and recognized the favourite of the household as a famous Parisian furrier. He had supplied enough sable coat linings for kings and ermine cloaks for queens to give him food for a lifetime of authentic anecdotes. His acquaintance with royalties was genuine of its kind, but it was not of a kind that appealed to the paying guests at Lady Dauntrey's. Dodo turned a cold shoulder upon him, and for a day or two gave her attention to the only other man in the house who pluckily advertised himself as unmarried. He advertised himself also as a millionaire, and not without reason, though Lord Dauntrey had cleverly picked him up in the Casino. When he mentioned, however, that he was a Sydney man, Miss Wardropp ceased to talk at him across the table. This change of tactics her enemies attributed to fear that he "knew all about her at home." But she told Mary that he had such slept-on looking ears, he took away her appetite; and one needed all the appetite one could muster to worry through a meal at the Bella Vista. Besides, she believed that he had made his fortune by some awful stuff which kept hair from decaying or teeth from falling off, and it did one no good to be seen in the Casino with a creature like that. It was almost better to go about with a woman, though she did

hate being reduced to walking with a female; it made a girl look so unsuccessful.

At length Dodo decided that, even for Mary's sake, she could no longer "stick it out" at the Bella Vista. She felt, she said, so wretched that she was "quite off her bonbons." The crisis came at luncheon and indirectly through the marmoset. Dodo paid well and regularly; therefore she was tacitly allowed certain privileges, not always approved by her fellow-guests. Diablette had been a standing cause of friction between Lady Dauntrey and the dog's mistress; but the marmoset, its successful rival in Dodo's affections, was grudgingly permitted whenever Lord Dauntrey had borrowed fifty francs or so, to select its own fruit from the dessert. Some people were even amused at seeing the tiny animal jump from Dodo's lap on to the table, and pick out the best grapes in an old-fashioned centre-piece. On the last fatal day, however, Lady Dauntrey's nerves had been rasped by the loss of her fifth cook. When the marmoset was taken suddenly and desperately ill in the bread plate, Eve flew into a rage, and high words passed like rapier flashes between her and Miss Wardropp. Dodo attributed her pet's seizure to the fact that Dauntrey fruit was unfit even for a monkey's consumption, and Eve informed the whole company that Dodo was a disgusting Australian pig. This was the last insult. Dodo shrilly "gave notice," while the marmoset was dying in her napkin. The meal ended in confusion; and Miss Wardropp went away that afternoon with the living Diablette,

the dead monkey, two teddy bears, an umbrella-mosquito-net, and seven trunks.

"Ask that man for your money back!" she advised Mary on the doorstep. "I don't say go to *her*, for she'd only tell you some lie. 'Lie and let lie' is her motto. She's reduced lying to a fine art. But ask him for your capital, my dear, and watch his face when you do it. Compared to his wife he's a model, even if it's a model of all the vices."

Mary missed Dodo. Diablette had been an invincible and dangerous enemy to the blue frog from the Mentone china shop, poor, blasé Hilda, who spent most of her time choking in flies a size too large for her, or trying helplessly to push them down her blue throat with a tiny turquoise hand. Dodo, however, had been a ray of brightness in the house: meretricious, garish brightness perhaps; still she had given a tinselline sparkle to the dull rooms when things were at their worst, and Lady Dauntrey clouded with sullen gloom.

When the newest and humblest guests of the Villa Bella Vista lost money beyond a certain limit, the bare thought of the Casino gave them mental indigestion. They then stayed safely at home, and infested the unaired drawing-room — pale people reading pink papers,and talking "system"; or flushed people playing bridge for small points, with the windows hermetically closed and their backs to the sunset. They quarrelled among themselves in a liverish way over cards and politics, and agreed only on the subject of such titled acquaintances as they had in

common, all of whom seemed to be perfectly charming. But these heraldic conversations bored Mary even more intensely than the squabbles. There came a time when desperation got the upper hand of that prudence so earnestly recommended by Lord Dauntrey. She could not endure the long evenings in the villa, and felt that she must again tempt fortune at the Casino.

One night after dinner she broke to her host the news that she need no longer trouble him to win money for her. She would take back her own half of the capital he was using, and play the old game once more.

"If I have a few days' luck, I think the wisest thing to do next would be to go away," she went on, forcing herself to laugh quite gayly, as if there were nobody at Monte Carlo whom it would hurt her cruelly never to see again. "I've stayed on and on, when all the time I ought to have been somewhere else. And I've never had courage to write my — my friends at home what I've been doing. Just one more 'flutter,' and then — goodbye!"

Her thoughts flew afar, as she made this little set speech. She saw Vanno as he had looked that day, and on other days when she had deliberately cut him in the street, or in the Casino, though she knew he had been waiting in the hope that she would relent and let him speak. His eyes haunted her everywhere. It seemed to her that they were very sad, and had lost that burning, vital light of the spirit which in contrast had made the personalities of other

men dull as smouldering fires. Occasionally he was near her at the tables, for he played constantly now, recklessly and often disastrously according to Hannaford.

The word "goodbye" and its attendant thought of departure brought Vanno's image as clearly before Mary as if he had walked into the ugly drawing-room, where people were shuffling cards for bridge or putting on their wraps for the Casino. It was Vanno alone who was real for her, not the other figures; and she did not see the grayness that settled like a shadow on Lord Dauntrey's lined and sallow face.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Grant," he said, "but I can't give you back your money now, for the simple reason that I banked most of your capital and mine this afternoon. I felt rather seedy, and didn't mean to play seriously to-night. If only you'd spoken in time, it would have been all right enough. But now I'm afraid the best I can do for you, until to-morrow, will be a few hundred francs. My wife and I must see what we can scrape together."

He jumbled his words, as if in a hurry to get them all out, and laughed apologetically, staring Mary straight in the face, insistently, with his melancholy eyes. Something in them caught her attention, distracting it from the thought that was always forcing itself in front of others. She readily believed that he "felt seedy," for he looked extremely ill. There were bags under the gray eyes, and his

skin seemed loose on his face, almost like a glove on a hand for which it is too large. Mary was sorry for him, and protested that after all she did not care about playing that night. She would wait till to-morrow, and he must not mind what she had said. He appeared to be slightly relieved; but though he smiled, his eyes kept the dull glassiness which gave them an unnatural effect.

Late that night Eve knocked at Mary's door. She had on a bright green dressing-gown, with a Chinese embroidery running over it of golden dragons and serpents. In her hand she carried a cheap silver-backed brush, and her long dark hair was undone. She looked strikingly handsome, but the thick black strands hanging down on either side of the white face recalled to Mary a picture in the library at Lady MacMillan's. It was a clever painting of the Medusa, level-eyed, with a red mouth like a wound, and dimly seen, pale glimmering features, between the lazy writhing of dark snakes. The thing had fascinated Mary in her impressionable schoolgirl days, but now she tried to huddle the idea quickly out of her head, for it seemed disloyal and even disgusting in connection with her hostess.

"I saw your light under the door," Lady Dauntrey said, "and I thought maybe you wouldn't mind my sitting with you for a bit. I do feel so beastly down on my luck, and you always cheer me up, you're so different from any of the others.'

Mary had begun, for perhaps the twentieth time, a letter to Reverend Mother; but she was half glad of

an excuse to put it away unfinished. She too was in a wrapper, with her shining hair over her shoulders, but she suggested a St. Ursula rather than a Medusa. There was no comfortable chair in the room, but she drew the only one whose legs could be depended upon, in front of a dying wood fire for Lady Dauntrey.

Eve sat for a few moments brushing her hair in a lazy, aimless way, and staring at the red logs. "Perhaps," she said at last, "I shall have to cheer *you* up, though, when you've heard what I've come for. Might as well out with it, I suppose! I know *I* can't bear having had news 'broken' to me. My husband told you he was seedy, didn't he? — and hadn't meant to play, so he'd banked all the money. He hadn't the courage, poor chap, to tell you what really happened. He's simply sick over it, so I offered to see you. In a way, it was true, what he said. The bank *has* got the money, only — it's the Casino bank. Dauntrey had an awful débacle to-day, the first time since he's been playing for you, and lost everything; not only your capital, of course, but his own too. It's your money he's so sick about, though. He could stand the loss of his own, though it's a blow, and I don't quite know what we shall do. But to lose yours! He's almost off his head. If it weren't for me, and my saying you'd forgive him, I believe he'd blow his brains out."

"Oh, don't speak of anything so horrible!" Mary cried. "Of course I forgive him."

"He's afraid you may think he has juggled away your money. When you asked him for it to-night

he was already wondering how you'd take the loss; but your proposal coming suddenly like that bowled him over, and he made an excuse to put off the evil hour. What a weird coincidence you should have wanted your capital back the very day he'd lost the lot! He's so sorry you didn't think of it yesterday; for then it would have been safe in your hands now, unless you'd lost it yourself, which I can't help thinking, my dear, you probably *would*, the way things were going with you before."

"I daresay I should have lost the money if he hadn't," said Mary kindly. In her heart, she wished that she had been given the chance, as at least she would then have had some amusement, before the money was gone. And certainly it was an odd coincidence that the loss should have happened just before she had suggested playing for herself again. She could not help remembering Dodo's parting shot at the Dauntreys. She wished that the idea had not been put into her head; for though she would not believe that Lord Dauntrey had robbed her, she saw that it was a mistake to have lent him the capital — a mistake from his point of view, as well as her own. The money was gone; and even if there were something wrong in the way of its going, she could not prove the wrong. Nor did she wish to try. She wished to believe the story Lady Dauntrey had told, which might easily be true. Yet there would always remain the little crawling snake of doubt; and that was not fair to Lord Dauntrey.

"It's too, too bad, and we are both terribly upset," Eve went on heavily. "But it's the fortune of war, isn't it? And, thank goodness, you've got plenty left of what the Casino's given you, I hope, in spite of that awful Christmas night."

"Oh, yes, I've got more, in Smith's Bank," said Mary. "I can draw some out to-morrow, and begin playing again. Tell Lord Dauntrey he mustn't mind as far as I'm concerned."

"I did tell him you'd be sporting, and that you were a good plucked one, but I couldn't console him. The truth is, *our* part of the loss is pretty serious. The Casino didn't give us any of our capital, you know, and we aren't rich. We've lost an awful lot this season. Monte Carlo's been disastrous to us in every way."

"But I thought Lord Dauntrey had done well with his system?" Mary ventured.

"Oh, the system!" Eve caught herself up, quickly. "Yes, that was all right. Only we never made much, as he couldn't afford high stakes. But he's so good-natured and generous. He lent money to others to gamble with — I won't say *who*, though perhaps you can guess — and never got a penny back. And some of the people we've had staying here ran up big bills and skipped without paying them. We simply had to let them go, and make the best of it. Oh, dear Miss Grant — Mary — this is a bad time to ask a favour, I know, when my husband's just come a cropper with your money, as well as his own; but I was never one to beat about

the bush. And you're a regular brick. You're in luck, and we're out — down and out! I wonder — *would* you be inclined to lend us — say, a thousand pounds, just to tide over the few weeks till our dividends come? We'd give you good security, of course. We have shares in South African diamond mines."

"I think I might be able to do that," said Mary, who could not bear to see Lady Dauntrey humble herself to plead

"How good you are!" Eve exclaimed. "You're a *real* friend, the only one we've got. The rest are sharks, or cats. It — it won't run you down low to let us have a thousand?" She fixed her eyes sharply on Mary, under the shadow of her falling hair, which she brushed as if mechanically.

"Oh no, I'm sure I can manage it very well."

"And keep enough to go on playing with?"

"Yes. I don't quite know how much I have in the bank. I've given away a good deal here and there, I suppose, besides what I lost — and this now. But there's sure to be plenty."

"Suppose, though, you go on losing? Of course I hope you won't. But there's that to think of. Still, I presume you needn't worry if the Casino should get back every penny they've given you? I hope you have ever and ever so much of your own. I think I heard you telling the Wardropp girl — wretched little beast! — that you had a big legacy left you?"

"I believe I did tell her so, in the train," said Mary. "I don't remember speaking of it since."

"I couldn't help overhearing what you said then. You were both talking at the top of your voices. Well, I'm glad for you. If you're wise, you'll put yourself out of temptation's way, and won't keep much beyond your winnings where you can lay hands on it."

"I came here with very little," Mary confessed. "You see, I'd meant to go on to Italy."

"And you were so lucky at first, that you've lived on your winnings, and have never had to write a cheque on your own bank in England or anywhere?"

"Not one!" laughed Mary. "Since I came into my money, I haven't drawn half a dozen cheques — except in the cheque-book I got at Smith's, after Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Carleton advised me to keep my winnings there."

"You fortunate girl! And think of all the lovely jewellery you've bought, too! Of course I'm glad for our sakes, that your friends advised you to store the best things in the bank, when you're not wearing them, for one never knows about one's servants; and there are such creatures as burglars. Still, I wonder you can bear having those heavenly things out of your sight. *I* couldn't!"

"I've felt rather tired of my jewellery lately," said Mary. "I hardly know why. But I don't seem to take the pleasure in wearing it that I did at first, when it was new to me."

Lady Dauntrey rose from the creaky chair with a sigh, and a slight shiver. "You look too much like a saint for jewellery to suit you as well as it does

other people — me for instance!" she said. "And you *are* a saint. I don't know how to thank you enough. My poor boy will be grateful! Well, I must go. You ought to have more wood on your fire. But I suppose it's gone. Everything always is in this house, if it's anything one wants. If ever you're in trouble of your own, and need a couple of friends to stand by you, you've got us. Let's shake on it!"

She put out her hand and drew Mary toward her. If the girl had not shrunk away almost imperceptibly, she would have bent down and kissed her.

XXI

The curé of Roquebrune learned in an odd way that his Principino was gambling; just in the queer roundabout way that secret things become public on the Riviera.

His housekeeper had a sister. That sister was the wife of a man who kept cows at Cap Martin, sold milk which the cows gave, and butter which he said that he made (gaining praise thereby), though it was really imported at night in carts from Italy.

The daughter was eighteen, and it was her duty to carry milk to the customers of her father, who did business under the name of Verando, Emilio. She was a beauty, and her fame spread until people of all classes made errands to the laiterie of Verando, Emilio, to stare at the dark-browed girl who was like a splendid Ligurian storm-cloud. When the twelve white cows of Emilio were occasionally allowed an outing, and could be seen glimmering among the ancient olive trees, the Storm-cloud walked with them; early in the morning, when the gray-blue of mountain and sky was framed like star sapphires in the silver of gnarled trunks and feathery branches; or else early in the evening, when the moon-dawn had come. The cows were supposed to chaperon Mademoiselle Nathalie Verando, who was by blood

more Signorina than Mademoiselle; but they countenanced several flirtations which were observed by the caretaker of Mirasole, the villa presently to be occupied by Prince Angelo Della Robbia and his bride.

The caretaker, consumed with jealousy because one of the flirters had flirted also with her daughter, told everybody that Nathalie Verando had been kissed in the olive woods. Jim Schuyler's cook was a friend of Luciola, the curé's housekeeper. When she heard of the incident in the Verando family, she told Nathalie's aunt that Mrs. Winter, the chaplain's wife at Monte Carlo, was in need of a parlour maid. The maid must be pretty, because Mrs. Winter could not bear to have ugly people about her. They ruined her appetite. This peculiarity was known at Stellamare, because Mrs. Winter's cousin, Mr. Carleton, was visiting there. Would it not be wise to put Nathalie into service, at a distance from Cap Martin, so that everything might be forgotten?

Mrs. Winter, to whom the suggestion was made by her cook (cousin to the cook at Stellamare), snapped at it eagerly. She had been out walking with Dick, and they had both seen the beautiful dark Stormcloud chaperoned by the white cows, among the olives.

Nathalie became *femme de chambre* in the apartment of Mrs. Winter. She was so charmed with her mistress, and with certain hats and blouses that Rose bestowed upon her, that she did not much miss the flirtations. But, being a good Catholic, and having

been confirmed by the curé of Roquebrune, her conscience asked itself whether it could be right to live in a household not only Protestant, but the abode of a priest who spread heresy. It occurred to her that she would go and put this question to the curé, her spiritual father; and she was not deterred from her resolve by the fact that Achille Gonzales had finished his military service and returned to visit his family. Achille's father was the Maire of Roquebrune, a peasant landowner of wealth whose pride was in his son and in their Spanish ancestry, which dated back to the days of Saracen fighting on the coast.

Achille was a great match; and the white cows had nibbled mint and clover from his hands before he went away with his regiment to Algeria. His father was about to make over to him some land adjoining the curé's garden, and the young man was there planting orange trees on fine days.

Nathalie chose a fine afternoon to ask Mrs. Winter if she might go to Roquebrune.

The curé, who was broad-minded, set her heart at rest about the possible iniquity of her service. He said that different religions were all paths leading up a steep hill, in the same direction, only some were more roundabout than others. Nathalie need not after all have taken the trouble to climb the mule track in the afternoon sun; yet she was not sorry she had come. Seldom had she looked so beautiful as when her aunt was giving her orange-syrup with water after her talk with the curé, the oranges being

a present to the house from Achille Gonzales. On the table in the little kitchen stood a silver photograph frame which Luciola was going to clean, as the salt air had tarnished its brightness. In the frame was a photograph of Prince Giovanni Della Robbia as a boy of eighteen; but so little had eleven years changed Vanno, that Nathalie recognized the picture at once.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "surely that is the handsome, tall young gentleman who walks over often to look at the Villa Mirasole, near our laiterie: the brother of the prince who is coming soon to live there."

"Why, yes, it is he," replied her aunt. "He is a friend of our curé's, and was once his pupil. He is the Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, a very noble, good young man."

"I am not sure he is so very good," retorted Nathalie, pleased to know something which her aunt perhaps did not know, about a person of importance.

Luciola's tiny body quivered with indignation. "Not good! How dare you say such a thing of our curé's Prince? What can you have to tell of a great noble in his position — you — a little no-one-at-all?"

The Storm-cloud lowered. "There are those as important as your Prince who do not think me a 'little no-one-at-all.' The grand folk who come to Cap Martin to call upon our lady the Empress Eugenie tell each other about me; English dukes and duchesses they are, and Spanish grandees, and high

nobility from all over the world, who visit the Cap to do her reverence. They make one excuse or another to have a look at your 'little no-one-at-all.' And a famous American artist has sketched me, in the olive woods. He would not let me run home even for five minutes to change into my best dress, nor would he permit that I put away my milk cans: that was my one regret! As for your Prince, he passed, taking a short cut to the villa, while I posed. Do you think he went on without looking? No; he stopped and spoke with the artist."

"Then that was because they were acquaintances," snapped Luciola.

"It is true they knew each other. But it was not for the *beaux yeux* of the big red-bearded artist that the Prince stopped. It was to look at my face in the sketch-book. There were other faces there, too, and on the page next to mine the profile of a most lovely lady, all blond like an angel, whose name the Prince knew, for he and the artist talked of her, and called her Miss Grant. I have heard much conversation about her since then, at Madame Winter's, at tea-time in the afternoon when I bring in the tray and give cakes to visitors. They all, especially Madame's cousin, speak of Miss Grant, and she is celebrated for her beauty as well as for her gambling: yet your Prince looked as much at my picture as at hers, quite as much; and the artist could have taken no more pains with me if I had been a queen. So you see what other people think. And as it happens, I *do* know a great deal about this Prince."

"Nothing against him, then, I am sure," persisted Luciola, though somewhat impressed. "Monsieur le Curé loves him, which alone proves that he is good."

"Does Monsieur le Curé consider it good to gamble at Monte Carlo?" inquired Nathalie, with assumed meekness.

"Of course not. Prince Giovanni would not stoop to such a pursuit."

"Oh, would he not? That is all you know of the world, here on your mountain, dear aunt. Me, I hear everything that goes on, though I live in the house of a cleric. Madame's cousin knows well your Prince, who, it is true, did not gamble at first, and seemed to scorn the Casino, so I heard from Monsieur Carleton while I poured the tea. But for some reason he has taken to play, the Prince. He is always in the Casino. He has refused to live in the villa at Cap Martin with his brother and sister-in-law, who have now arrived, because he hates to be too far from the Casino, though perhaps they may not know why. Monsieur Carleton has told Madame that not once have they been inside its doors, or shown themselves at any Monte Carlo restaurant. Oh, your Prince is a wild gambler, aunt, and loses much money, which is a silly way of amusing one's self, in my opinion. And that is why I say he is not so good as you and Monsieur le Curé think him, you who are so innocent."

"I do not believe one word of your foolish gossip," was the only satisfaction Nathalie got from Luciola.

But when the girl had gone, the little old woman was in such haste to retell the tale to the curé, that she did not even throw a glance at Nathalie. If she had, she might have seen the Storm-cloud brightening when, quite by accident, she was met by Achille Gonzales within a few yards of the curé's door.

Old as she was, Luciola had an excellent memory for anything that interested her, though she was capable of forgetting what was best forgotten in a household, such as the breaking of a dish, or the reason why the cat had been left out of doors all night in the rain. She repeated what she had heard from her niece, almost word for word, wandering a little sometimes from the straight path of the narrative into side tracks, such as the anecdote of the artist who took as much pains with Nathalie's portrait as with that of the great beauty, Miss Grant, who was always gambling at the Casino, the place where wicked people said that Prince Giovanni played. No exciting detail did Luciola neglect.

The curé listened to the end, without interrupting, greatly to the housekeeper's disappointment, as she had made her narrative piquant in the hope of tempting her master to ask questions. But he showed no emotion of any kind, and only remarked at last that Luciola was quite right not to believe gossip about the Prince, or indeed evil of any one.

Nevertheless her story left him reflective. He thought it not impossible that Vanno was gambling; and if it were the case, several things would be explainable. It was many days since the Prince had

come to Roquebrune, although the curé had done what he did not wish to do, in order to please his one-time pupil.

Vanno was well aware that it was not the curé's affair to call upon strangers out of his own parish, except by special request. To call uninvited upon a person in Monaco might seem to the curé and abbé of San Carlo like an intrusion: and to present himself at a hotel, inquiring for a young lady whom he did not even know to be a Catholic, had been an ordeal. This, for the Principino's sake, he had done not once but twice, as Vanno knew. And in truth the Prince had seemed too preoccupied with disappointment because Miss Grant was not at home to express much gratitude when the curé told him of the two calls.

Not since the third day before Christmas had Vanno come to Roquebrune, nor had he written his old friend; and certainly the curé had wondered, for now the new year was more than a week old; and always the weather had been of that brilliance the peasant women consider necessary after Noël for the washing of the Christ child's clothes by the Sainte Vierge, His mother. There had been no such excuse as rain to prevent a visit; but at last the curé guessed at a reason which might have kept Vanno from wishing to see him.

On New Year's Day — the great fête — the priest had called in the afternoon on Prince and Princess Della Robbia, at the Villa Mirasole, knowing that their arrival had been delayed until the night before.

Vanno, who had lunched with them, had already gone; and it was no news to the curé that the younger brother was not living at Cap Martin. Angelo referred to this change of plan, saying laughingly that no doubt the foolish boy feared to interrupt a tête-à-tête. Nonsense this, of course; for the honeymoon had extended itself over months, and the Princess was anxious to see as much as possible of her new brother-in-law. Angelo, too, particularly wished Vanno to love Marie as a sister, and report well of her to the Duke, whose favourite he was. It was no secret that Vanno could do what he liked with his father, although no other soul was permitted to take liberties with the Duke.

Nothing had been left unsaid which might assure Vanno of his welcome, yet he insisted on remaining at some Monte Carlo hotel, only coming over to lunch or dinner, though Angelo quite understood that his brother had promised to live with him.

The curé, soothing the elder and defending the younger gayly, thought in his heart that he knew better than Angelo why Vanno clung to Monte Carlo. He supposed Miss Grant to be the attraction, but this was the Principino's affair, and the curé kept the secret. Miss Grant's name was not mentioned. Evidently Prince and Princess Della Robbia had not heard of her.

Vanno's infatuation for the girl did not seem a light thing to the curé, and he thought of it anxiously, hoping and sometimes believing that the young man would be strong enough to hold himself aloof, unless

Miss Grant should show herself worthy of a noble, not a degrading, love. The priest had kept his promise in going to see her; but until this rumour of Vanno's gambling reached him he had not been able to regret his failure. The responsibility of judging and truthfully reporting his opinion of a young woman had weighed heavily upon his spirits. Supposing the curé had said to himself that he saw Miss Grant and thought nothing but good of her? The Principino might on the strength of his report be reckless enough to propose marriage. A good and beautiful girl might still be an unsuitable match for a son of the Duke of Rienzi; and on the priest's head would, in a sense, lie the blame if she became the wife of Prince Vanno. Altogether, the curé had been inclined to think that the saints had perhaps had a hand in sending him twice to call when Miss Grant was not visible. Now, however, he took himself to task. He had been careless. He had considered his own selfish feelings too much in this matter. If the Principino had taken to gambling (a vice he had once sneered at as a refuge for the destitute in intellect) there must have been some extraordinary incentive. The curé was sure of this; and granting it without mental argument, he set himself to the task of deduction.

"One would say I flattered myself by thinking that I had been born a detective!" he remarked aloud to his favourite rose-bush, when Luciola had emptied her news-bag for him, in the garden. "Me, a detective? Heaven forbid! Yet at the same time,

if I have brain-power to be of service to my Principino, the saints give me wit to use it."

Then he thought very hard, sitting in his arbour, on the wooden seat which gave a view over the whole coast, with its mountains whose feet were promontories. Half amused, half alarmed lest the pretence were sin, he tried to put himself in Vanno's place; and so doing it was borne in upon his mind that something of importance must have happened between the Prince and Miss Grant. She had been gambling all the while, though Vanno had not at first gambled: but if they had met — if there had been a scene which had driven the Prince to desperation — might that not explain the change? Had she definitely proved herself unworthy, or had Vanno openly done her some injustice, which had wrought bitterness for both? In any case, the curé decided that he had been mistaken in the designs of Providence for himself. After all, perhaps it had been meant for him to meet Miss Grant, and he had been indifferent, had turned a deaf ear to the voice which bade him try again and yet again.

He resolved to call upon the girl, not only once more, but many times if necessary, and when there was something to report, he would have an excuse to go and see Vanno.

All this, indirectly through Nathalie Verando's walks with the white cows, in the olive woods of Cap Martin, and more directly through the tarnishing of a silver frame on an old photograph.

XXII

Eve Dauntrey was in the act of opening the door as the curé of Roquebrune put out his hand to touch the bell at the Villa Bella Vista.

Somehow it was a shock to find herself face to face with a priest, on her own doorstep; and before she could quite control her nerves, she broke out with a brusque, "What do you want?"

The curé looked calmly at her, his pleasant, sunburned face betraying none of the surprise he felt at such a reception. In his modest way he was a quick and keen observer, though he had never deliberately prided himself on being a judge of character. It seemed to him that the handsome, hard-eyed woman with the white face and scarlet lips was startled at the sight of his black cassock, as if she had done something which she would not like to have a priest find out.

This made him spring to the conclusion that she had been brought up as a Catholic, but was one no longer.

"I have called upon a lady who, I am told, is staying here," he explained politely in French. "Miss Grant."

"Miss Grant?" Eve could not help showing that she was puzzled and not pleased. "Yes, Miss

Grant is visiting me," she admitted. Then, with a sudden impulse which she could hardly have explained, quickly added: "Unfortunately she's out. Is there any message you would like to leave?"

As she asked this question, Lady Dauntrey stared with almost ostentatious frankness straight into the curé's face, and her voice had lost its sharpness. She was dressed in purple velvet, and wore a large purple hat. The rich dark hue gave her light eyes a very curious colour, more green than gray; and as she stood on the doorstep, tall and somehow formidable, the curé thought that she looked Egyptian, an elemental creature who might have lived by the Nile when the Sphinx was new.

The afternoon sunshine streamed into her eyes, and caused her pupils to shrink until they appeared to be no larger than black pinheads. Perhaps, the curé acknowledged to himself, it was only this that gave them a deceitful effect; nevertheless he felt suddenly sure that for some reason she was lying to him. He did not believe that Miss Grant was out.

"This lady does not wish me to meet her guest," he told himself. But aloud he said that he regretted missing Miss Grant; and there was no message, thanks, except that the curé of Roquebrune had called again. He was making up his mind to a certain course, and stood aside politely, meaning to let Lady Dauntrey pass, and then follow her down the steps of her villa. What he would do after that was his own affair; for with those who are subtle it is permitted to be subtle in return. Lady

Dauntrey, however, seemed unwilling to let him linger. Instead of passing him, she asked, "Are you coming my way?"

"As you tell me, Madame, that Miss Grant is out, I will go on to the Church of Sainte Devote, which is not far away," the curé answered.

"Oh!" The slight look of strain on Lady Dauntrey's face passed, as if her muscles relaxed. "Then we go in different directions. I am walking up the hill to Monte Carlo. Good afternoon. I will remember to give Miss Grant your message."

They parted, but Lady Dauntrey turned her head twice, each time to see the curé's black-robed figure marching at a good pace away from the villa. Then she went on faster; and the importance of the incident began to fade from her mind. Not that it had ever had any real importance, she assured herself. Only, she hated priests as she would hate to see a raven fly over her head. They seemed somehow ominous; and she could not understand why a member of the interfering tribe wanted to see Miss Grant, unless to try and get her away into less worldly surroundings. Lady Dauntrey did not wish Mary to go; and she was glad she had acted on impulse, saying that the girl was out. It was lucky that she had met the priest, for had he arrived a minute sooner or a minute later, a servant would have told him that Miss Grant was in. Eve decided that she would forget to mention the curé of Roquebrune's visit.

Having said that he would go to the Church of

Sainte Devote, the curé conscientiously kept his word. Luckily the Villa Bella Vista was not far from the deep, dim ravine where the patron saint of Monaco was supposed to have drifted ashore in a boat, piloted by a sacred dove, and rowed by faithful followers after suffering martyrdom in Corsica. The curé was fond of the strange little church of sweet chimes, almost hidden between immense, concealing walls of rock; but to-day he merely paid his respects to the saint and quickly went his way again. Twenty minutes after parting from Lady Dauntrey, he rang the bell of her villa, and was told by an untidy servant that Miss Grant was at home.

Mary was waiting in the house to receive Mrs. Winter, who had been persuaded by Carleton to overlook the girl's neglect, and to call once more, with him. Dick had asked Mary not to speak of the visit in advance to Lady Dauntrey, as his cousin wanted a chance for a talk, uninterrupted by the mistress of the villa; and Mary half guiltily, though with a certain pleasure, had consented. Instinctively she guessed that Eve would have taken the call for herself, and that Mrs. Winter would have found little time to chat with any one else. It was hateful to be hypercritical, Mary felt, yet she had begun to see that Lady Dauntrey was curiously jealous of her; that she did not like to see her talk with strangers, or alone even with other guests of the house.

When the curé of Roquebrune was ushered in, Mary was expecting Dick to arrive with his cousin;

but for the moment she was alone in the drawing-room which she had made less depressing by a generous gift of flowers. The alertness with which the girl sprang up, on his entrance, and the quick change of expression told the curé that she was expecting another visitor. "Could it be the Prince?" was the question which darted through his mind. But, no. There was neither disappointment nor relief on her face, only surprise. He argued in consequence that the visitor was not awaited with emotion.

The servant who admitted the curé had not said that the occupant of the drawing-room was Miss Grant, but his first glance assured him of her identity. Yes, this must be the face, the eyes, which had appealed to all the romance in Vanno. Even the man whom conviction had dedicated body and soul to the religion of self-sacrifice had enough humanity mingling with his saintliness to feel the peculiar appeal of this gentle girl. She was not only a woman, she was Woman. Unconsciously she called, not to men, but to man, to all that was strong, to all that was chivalrous and desired to give protection.

There was nothing modern about the type, the curé told himself, though it might be that this particular specimen of it had been trained to modern ideas. Such a woman would never struggle for her "rights." They would be flung at her feet as tribute, before she could ask, and quite without thought she would accept them. The curé would have laughed had he been accused of lurking ten-

dencies toward romance, except perhaps in his love of gardens; yet he seemed to reflect the impressions of Vanno, to realize with almost startling keenness the special allurement Miss Grant had for the Prince; that remoteness from the ordinary which suggested the vanished loveliness of Greece with all its poetry; which would make an accompaniment of music seem appropriate to every movement, like the *leit motif* for a woman in grand opera.

"She is good and sweet," he said to himself, even before he spoke. "I seem to see her surrounded by a halo of purity." And he thought that a man who loved this girl could not forget, or love another woman. He did not lose sight of Vanno's position, or belittle it, in thinking it of small consequence compared to love: but he said, "This is a girl in a million. She is worthy of the highest place." And in an undertone something else was whispering in him, "I may have but a few minutes to do what I have come for." His spirit rose to the occasion. If the certain reward had been a cardinal's hat, he could not have determined more obstinately on success; perhaps he would not have strained toward the goal with the same energy, for rightly or wrongly the curé had no temporal ambition for himself. He loved his mountain flock, and had no wish to leave it. His garden was to him what a boxful of jewels is to some women. What he had to do in the next few minutes was to secure Vanno's happiness and the girl's; for it did not occur to him as possible that she had no love for Vanno.

"I think," began Mary, "that you must be the curé of Roquebrune, and that it was you who came to see me at the hotel. It was very kind of you, and so kind to come again. I meant to have gone up to your church, but —— "

"I understand," he put in when she paused, showing embarrassment. "Still, I want you to come not only to my church, but to my garden. It will do you good. It is that which I have called to ask you to do. That, and one other thing."

"One other thing?" Mary looked a little anxious. Now he would perhaps say that he had heard from the convent, that they knew where she was, and had begged him to admonish her.

"Yes, one other thing. You will think I am abrupt in mentioning it, but you see, I must speak quickly, for at any moment I may be interrupted, and the thing is of great importance — to me, because it concerns one whom I love — he who first asked me to come and see you, Prince Vanno Della Robbia."

"It was he who asked you?" The words burst from her. She had been pale; but suddenly the lilies of her face were turned to roses, as one flower may seem to be transformed into another, by the trick of an Indian fakir.

"Yes. Because I am his old friend, and he wished that you and I might also be friends. That was before he had ever spoken one word to you, or you to him; but now, I feel sure, you have met?"

Mary's flaming face paled and hardened. "What has he told you?" she asked sharply.

"Nothing. I have not seen him for many days. But because I have not, and because of what I hear of him, I think you have met. I think, too, that perhaps you both made some mistakes about each other. I will not even beg you not to consider me impertinent or intrusive. It would insult your intelligence and your heart. I ask you, my child, to tell me whether or no I have guessed right?"

"He made mistakes about me," she replied, almost sullenly. "I don't see how it's possible that I have made any about him."

"It is not only possible but certain if you believe him capable of wronging you in thought or act. I know him. And I heard him speak of you. Any woman might thank heaven for inspiring such words from a man. I tell you this, I who am a priest: He loves you, and did love you from the moment he first set eyes upon your face."

"I know," Mary answered simply, and with something of the humbleness of a child rebuked by high authority. "He said that to me. But — no, I can't tell you any more."

"That 'but' has told me everything. You sent him away?"

"Yes."

"And I know him well enough to be sure that he has tried to see you again, to justify himself?"

"He has written. I sent back the letter. And

he has wanted to speak, but I have never let him. I thought it would be wrong."

"Then, my poor child, did you think it less wrong send him to his ruin?"

" to his ruin — I?"

"Because you believed him evil, you have roused evil in him, and driven him to evil. I wish to read you no moral lecture on gambling; but for him, for a man of his nature, it is a dangerous and powerful drug if taken to kill pain. I have come to ask you to save him, since I believe only you can do it."

"I?" she echoed, bitterly. "But I am a gambler! There's gambler's blood in my veins. I was warned, and wouldn't listen. Now I know there's no use struggling, so I go on. How can I save any one from a thing I do myself — a thing I feel I shall keep on doing?"

"Because he loves you, you can save him; and because you love him, too."

She threw her head back, with the gesture of a fawn in flight. "Why should you say that?"

"I say what I know. I read your heart. And it is right that you should love him."

"No! For he insulted me."

"You thought so. It was a deceiving thought. Let him prove it false. Come to my garden to-morrow, and I will bring him to you there. I would not say this unless I were sure of him. And I tell you again, his salvation is in you. You have driven him to the drug of forgetfulness. You owe

it to his soul to give him justice. For the rest, let him plead."

"Madame Veentaire and Meestaire Carleton," announced the shabby man-servant, blundering abruptly in, as if the door had broken away in front of him.

The fire died out of the priest's face, but there was no sense of defeat in his eyes. His calm after excitement was communicated subtly to Mary, and enabled her to greet her new guests without confusion.

The curé bowed with old-fashioned politeness, and with a slight fluttering of the voice Mary made him known to the chaplain's wife and Dick Carleton.

"But we know each other already, Monsieur le Curé and I," exclaimed Rose, putting out her hand. She explained this to Mary with her bright, enthusiastic smile. "My husband and I take long walks together. One of our first was up to Roquebrune; and we went into the church — such a huge, important church for a little hill town! Monsieur le Curé was there, and we talked, and he showed us the picture under a curtain. How I do love pictures under curtains, don't you? They're so beautifully mysterious. And through a door there was a glimpse of fairyland. I couldn't believe it was real — I hardly believe so now, though Monsieur le Curé waved his wand and made us free of the place, as if it were a 'truly' garden. Have you been there yet, Miss Grant?"

"I was just inviting her to come for the first time,

to-morrow," said the curé. "Advise her to accept, Madame, for three o'clock."

"Indeed I do!" Rose smiled from him to Mary.

The curé moved forward, holding out his hand. He made it evident that this was goodbye. "Will you not take Madame's advice, and my invitation?" he asked, his good brown eyes warm and gentle.

"Yes!" Mary answered impulsively, laying her hand in his.

He clasped it, looking kindly into her face. "I am very glad. Thank you. I will meet you in the church," he said; no more; but Mary knew that he meant, "Thank you for trusting me."

"His Highness is out," was the answer at the Hôtel de Paris to the curé's inquiries. No, the Prince had left no word as to when he would come in. Often he was away for dinner, and sometimes did not return until late at night.

"Eh bien! I will wait," said the curé with a sigh. He had determined to carry the thing through, and would not fail for lack of persistence.

Vanno might be in any one of a dozen places, but the curé with his mind's eye saw the young man at the Casino. There he could not seek him even if he would, as a man in clerical dress would not be admitted. Resignedly the priest sat down in a retired corner of the hall, where he could watch those who came in by the revolving door. That he should be sitting in this home of gayety and fashion at Monte Carlo appealed to his sense of humour. "A

bull in a china shop," he thought, "is in his element compared to poor Father Pietro Coromaldi in the hall of the Hôtel de Paris."

At first he was half shyly diverted by the gay pageant around him, the coming and going of perfectly dressed men and women of many nations, who drank tea and ate little cakes, while the band played the sort of music which can have no mission save as an incentive to conversation.

But time went on, and Vanno did not come. The curé tired of the people, most of whom he felt inclined to pity, as no real joy shone out of their eyes, even when they laughed. He thought the pretty, smiling young women were like attractive advertisements for tooth-pastes, and face-powders, and furs, and hats. They did not look to him like real people, living real, everyday lives; and Miss Grant, though perhaps she led just such an existence, seemed to belong to a different order of being.

At last Lady Dauntrey, in her smart purple dress, came in with a tall, haggard man who had the eyes of a chained and starving dog. They joined a conspicuous party whose principal members were a fat woman massaged to the teeth, a dark girl who had evidently a sharp eye to the main chance as well as to the picturesque, and a hook-nosed, appallingly pompous man who would strut on the edge of the grave.

"Those are the Holbeins," said a woman, who at that moment came with another to a seat near the curé's inconspicuous corner. "They represent the

ideal vulgarity. Rich beyond the dreams of reasonable avarice! When the mother and father die, the girl's last tribute to their memory will be to order them bijou tombstones. And *they* are the sort of people those wretched Dauntreys are driven to know!"

The curé, catching a name made familiar to him earlier in the day, turned his head to glance at his neighbours, who were seating themselves at a small round table. At the same time one of the two women, the one who had not spoken, looked at him. Instant recognition flashed in the eyes of both. The lady bowed with distant politeness, and he returned the courtesy. She it was who had come to him at Roquebrune, one day weeks ago, asking for news of Prince Della Robbia, of whose acquaintance with him she was evidently informed.

She was dressed more elaborately this afternoon. The curé had described her to Vanno as wearing a gray travelling dress. To-day she was in black, with a large velvet hat which set off her pale face, her pale eyes and hair, making her look striking and almost handsome; younger, too, than the curé had thought, though she had no air of girlishness. "Idina Bland" was the name Vanno had ejaculated, on hearing her description; and he had gone on to say that she was a distant relative, who had lived for some time in Rome and at Monte Della Robbia.

Certainly Vanno's surprise at hearing of her presence on the Riviera, and her questions concerning the family, had not been of an agreeable nature.

He had thought that she was in America, and evidently would not have been sorry if she had stayed there; yet any uneasiness he felt had not, apparently, been on his own behalf. Angelo's name had been mentioned, and then Vanno had rather abruptly turned to another subject.

The curé blamed himself for curiosity, yet he could not help feeling curious concerning the young woman with eyes which he had described as like those of a statue.

He wondered if she knew that the Prince was at the Hôtel de Paris, and if she had come there to see him; or if, perhaps, they had already met since he first mentioned her to Vanno. He wished that his small knowledge of English were larger, but though he spoke the language not at all, and understood only a little, he gathered here and there a word of the conversation. Idina Bland's companion was evidently telling her about the "celebrities"; therefore he deduced that she was better acquainted with the Riviera than was the younger woman. Now and then the curé caught the word "Annonciata," and he wondered if the pair were staying at the place of that name. He knew it well, the beautiful little pointed mountain above Mentone, with its deserted convent, its sad watching cypresses, its one hotel in a fragrant garden, and its famous view of the Corsican mirage. If Vanno's cousin lived in that hotel, which could be reached only by a funicular or a picturesque mule path, it looked as if she had a wish for retirement.

The priest would have liked to know if she had been at the Annonciata ever since her visit to him. Prince Della Robbia had not mentioned her, on New Year's Day, but that was no sure argument of his ignorance. Miss Bland's presence might not seem of importance to him. The curé asked himself if it would be indiscreet to bring up the subject when he next saw Angelo. Any day, now, he might have a summons to lunch with the bride and bridegroom, and to bless their villa, which he had been requested to do as soon as they were settled.

Almost involuntarily he kept alert, listening for the name of Della Robbia, but it was not uttered. The elder woman evidently enjoyed her position as cicerone, and at last her catalogue of celebrities so wearied the curé that he grew nervous. He turned to watch Lady Dauntrey, at a distance, trying to read her face and that of the melancholy man he took to be her husband. He did not like to think of Miss Grant — his Principino's Miss Grant — being at that woman's house.

"We shall see what can be done," he said to himself, trying to enliven the long minutes of his waiting, minutes which seemed to grow longer and ever longer, like shadows at evening.

By six o'clock the great hall and tea-room adjoining were nearly empty. The Dauntreys and the Holbeins had gone, and nearly all the pretty, chattering young women who were like advertisements in picture-papers. Still Miss Bland and her friend lingered over their tea and cakes, though they had

ceased to eat or drink; and the curé could not help thinking that they had a special object in staying on. Eventually, however, they paid the hovering waiter, and slowly walked out, Idina Bland once again bending her head coldly to the priest.

Night's darkness shut round the brilliant *Place* of the Casino, like a blue wall surrounding a golden cube of light, and the curé would have a dark walk up the mule path. In order to come down that afternoon, he had given the service of vespers to a friend from Nice, who had just arrived for a short visit and a "rest cure"; still, he had expected to be back by this time. He began to feel oddly homesick and even unhappy in this hall which to his taste appeared garish. It seemed to him that he was a prisoner, and that he would be detained here forever. A childish yearning for his little parlour filled his heart. The waiters stared at him. But he sat very upright and unyielding on the chair which was made for lazy comfort.

"I will stay," he said to himself, "if it must be, till after midnight. Those two shall be made to save one another. It is the only way. And there is no time to waste."

At seven o'clock Vanno came in hastily, glancing at his watch. He walked so fast across the marble floor, with its islands of rugs, that he was at the foot of the stairway before the shorter-legged curé could intercept him; but at the sound of the familiar voice calling "Principino!" he turned, astonished.

The curé thought that he looked weary, and older than on that first blue-and-gold morning on the mountain; but the weariness was chased away by a smile of welcome.

"Why, Father, you here! This is an honour," Vanno said; but in his eyes there was the same shadow the curé had seen in Mary Grant's, the expectation of blame. Poor Vanno! He was resigning himself, his old friend saw, to a lecture. Perhaps he thought that Angelo, hearing of and disapproving certain stories, had begged the priest to come and scold him.

"You look tired," Vanno added, as they shook hands.

"So do you, my son," said the curé.

"I am, rather. But —— " He stopped, yet the older man guessed the end of the sentence.

"You are dining out, and must get ready in a hurry."

"I'm due at Angelo's at eight. I've plenty of time though. I shall take a taxi. I hope you haven't been waiting long?"

"More than two hours. I would not go — even to oblige the waiters."

"Two hours! Then —— "

"Yes. It was that, my Principino. I had to see you. I have come — to make you a reproach. You know why?"

Vanno's face hardened slightly. "I can imagine. Who told you? Angelo?"

"Who told me what?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders, then nodded slightly in the direction of the Casino, which, through the big windows of the hall, could be seen sparkling with light. "That I've taken to amusing myself — over there. But it's no use scolding, Father. It's very good of you to feel an interest in your old pupil, though whoever has been telling tales oughtn't to have put you to this trouble. I must 'dree my ain weird,' as the Scots have it. I can translate it only by saying that I must go to the devil in my own way."

'I have not come to scold you for gambling, if that is what you mean," the curé said mildly. "Angelo has told me nothing. Nobody sent me to you. I have to reproach you for something quite different. I have seen Miss Grant, Principino. How you could suspect for a moment that there was anything but a pure soul behind those eyes, I cannot understand."

Vanno grew pale. He was obliged to be silent for an instant, in defence of his self-control. "I know very little of women's eyes, and of their souls nothing at all," he answered, harshly.

"So much the better, perhaps, because you can learn only good of the sex from Miss Grant's," said the curé.

"She will let me learn no lesson from her — unless, that there is no forgiveness for one mistake."

"That is because she cared so much that you hurt her cruelly. She did not tell me so, though we have spoken of you, but I saw how it was. There

is no question of a mistake this time. And when you have talked together in my garden to-morrow afternoon, she will forgive and understand everything."

"Is she going to your place?"

"At three o'clock she will be there. You had better come a little earlier."

"I shall not come at all," Vanno blazed out, with violence. "She believes already that I've persecuted her. I won't give her reason to think it."

"Poor child, she is very unhappy," the curé sighed, meekly.

"At least, it isn't I who have made her so."

"Perhaps it is herself, and that is sadder — to have only herself to blame. You say you must be allowed to go to the devil in your own way. Well, you are a man. You do not want another man, even if he be a priest, to try and save you. But she needs a man to save her, a strong man who loves her well. She is drifting, without a rudder. She told me to-day — with such a look in her eyes! — that she has 'gambler's blood' in her veins. Only one thing can save her now, for she has got the idea in her head that she is the victim of Fate. The one thing is: an interest ten million times greater than gambling — Love."

The blood rushed to Vanno's face.

"I'm not fit —— " he stammered.

"The soul that's in you is fit to do God's work, for love is part of God. 'Thy soul must overflow,

if thou another's soul would reach.' Now, my son, I won't keep you any longer. At two-thirty tomorrow in my garden."

He did not remember until he was halfway up the mule path that he had meant to speak of Idina Bland.

XXIII

THERE came a moment when it seemed to Mary that she had promised to do an undignified thing, a thing which would make Vanno respect her less than ever. To go out deliberately to meet him, after all that had passed! — it was impossible. She must send a message to the curé saying that she could not come to his garden.

She even began such a letter, late on the night after his call; but as she wrote, the good brown eyes of the priest seemed to look at her, saying, "I thank you for trusting me." Then she tore up the sheet of paper, and went on trusting him blindly. She slept better afterward than she had slept since Christmas, her first night in the Villa Bella Vista.

Mary's habit was to go to the Casino every morning as soon as the doors opened, and she paid the artist whom she had met in the Paris train to seize a place for her, in the rush of early players. For doing this he received ten francs, which gave him two stakes at roulette, and sometimes enabled him to play for several hours before he was "cleaned out." She had lost a good deal by this time; all her original winnings, and had begun to fall back on her own capital, for her luck had never returned for more than a few hours together. A hateful sense of

failure was upon her. She was feverishly anxious to get back her losses, not so much for the money's sake as for the pleasure of "beating the bank," as she had continually beaten it at first. Once, she had had the great white, good-natured animal under her feet, and people had looked at her with wondering admiration, as if she had been Una leading an obedient lion. Now the admiring looks, tributes to her lovely face and pretty clothes or jewels, were tempered with pity. The lion had Una in his mouth. There seemed to be no question in the public mind as to how he would eventually dispose of her. Mary felt the difference keenly. She could hardly submit to it. She wanted desperately to do something which, in every sense, would turn the tables. She risked huge sums in a wild hope that her courage might conquer luck, that again she might know the peculiar joy, the indescribable thrill of seeing the "bank" send for more money. Yet deep down within her a voice said that the moment would never come again; and she had no longer her old gay confidence in placing her stakes.

The crowds had ceased to collect round her table, to watch the "wonderful Miss Grant." It is the sensational wins, where piles of gold and notes mount up, that people rush to gaze upon. They are not amused by seeing money monotonously swept off the tables, even in immense sums. It discourages and depresses them. Nobody likes to be discouraged and depressed; therefore Mary had lost her audiences. Still she played on, and listened to no advice.

This morning, however, when she woke to remember her promise to the curé, she felt oddly disinclined to go to the Casino. Usually she wakened, after dozing fitfully, dreaming over again last night's worries, with an almost tremulous longing to be at the tables once more, a longing that seemed even more physical than mental, an aching of the nerves. Now the burning desire was suddenly assuaged, or forgotten in the powerful sway of a new thought, as illness can be forgotten in sudden fear or joy. The Casino appeared unimportant, trivial. All there was of her was already on the mountain, in the little garden which Rose Winter had said was like fairyland.

Mary did not wish to be questioned by anybody in the house, however; so she went out at the usual hour, found her employé in the long queue of those who waited before the Casino doors, paid him, and said that he might keep the seat for himself. She then went to walk on the terrace, hoping that no one she knew might be there: and it seemed likely that she would have her wish, for most of her acquaintances were keen gamblers who considered a morning wasted outside the Casino.

Mary walked to the eastern end of the terrace, where the *ascenseur* comes up from the level of the railway station below. She remembered how she had heard the little boy give his musical cry, and how she had looked out of the train window, and his smile had decided her not to go on. If she had gone on, how different everything would have been, how

much better perhaps; and yet — she could not be sorry to-day, as she was sometimes in bitter moments, that she had come to Monte Carlo.

As she stood by the balustrade, looking away toward Italy, a voice she knew spoke behind her. She turned, and saw Hannaford, his hat off, his marred face pale in the sunshine.

"Oh," she said impulsively, "I think you're the one person I could endure talking to just now!"

Since the night of the ball on the yacht, when they had sat on the terrace in the moonlight, they had become good friends, she and Hannaford. She had no feeling of repulsion for him now. That was lost in pity, and forgotten in gratitude for the sympathy which made it possible to confide in him as she could in no one else. He stood entirely apart from other men, in her eyes, as he seemed to stand apart from life, and out of the sun. When she spoke to him of her troubles or hopes it was not, to her, as if she spoke to a man like other men, but to a sad spirit, who knew all the sadness her spirit could ever know.

Often they had walked here together on the terrace, but it was usually in the afternoon, when Hannaford could persuade her out of the Casino for a few minutes, to "revive herself with a breath of fresh air," or to see the gold-and-crimson sunset glory behind the Rock of Hercules. Since Hannaford had won the money he wanted for the buying of his villa, he had kept his resolution not to play seriously; but he spent a good deal of time in the

Casino, unobtrusively watching over Mary. He did not feel the slightest desire to play, he told Carleton, and other men who were amused or made curious by the sudden change in him. He had a "new interest in life," he explained; and every one took it for granted that he meant the villa, now his own. But he never said it was that which had made life better worth living for him.

"If it's a question of bare endurance of me, I'll go," he answered Mary's greeting, "and leave you to walk by yourself."

"No," she assured him. "I'd really like to have you. I thought I wanted to be alone. But I see now that being with you is better."

Hannaford drew in a long breath of the exquisite air, and looked up into the sunshine as if for once he did not feel himself unfitted for the light. "Do you really mean that, I wonder?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes. I wouldn't say it if I didn't," Mary answered with complete frankness. "How do you happen to be here at this time of day?"

"To tell the truth, I saw you go down the steps, and followed to ask the same question."

"I came, because for some reason I have to be out of doors. I *couldn't* go into the Rooms! I'd take a long walk, if I knew where to go."

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. Will you let me guide you somewhere, and give you a surprise?"

Mary looked undecided. "I'd like that. But I have an engagement this afternoon. Not in the

Casino — or anywhere at Monte Carlo. It's up at Roquebrune. I have promised to go and see the — the curé's garden there."

"I'll bring you back from my expedition in plenty of time, if that's all," said Hannaford. He did not urge, but Mary knew that he very much wanted her to say yes.

"Will it be out of doors?"

"All the time out of doors, except for a few minutes when you're looking at a curiosity. First we have to get to Mentone. I'll spin you over there in a taxi. Then we can walk to — to the surprise. I'm sure you've never been."

"Is it to see your villa?" Mary asked, for he had suggested her going there some day.

"No, for I wouldn't take you to my house alone. We're not very conventional, you and I, I'm afraid; but there must be a party for your first visit to my 'castle in Spain' transplanted into Italy. I'll give you, and any people you like to ask, a picnic luncheon over there. But to-day I want you to lunch with me alone somewhere."

There was rather an odd ring in his voice, which made Mary look up quickly, but his face was calm, even stolid, as usual; and she thought that she had been mistaken. She put herself quietly into his care, feeling the comfort of perfect ease in his companionship. She could talk to him if she chose, or be silent. Whatever she liked, he too would like.

Half an hour later the taxi which Hannaford had hired stopped at the bridge dedicated to the Em-

press of Austria, the bridge which marks the dividing line between the communes of Roquebrune and Mentone. Then the two walked along the sea front, where the spray spouted gold in the sun, and a salt tang was on the breeze. It was a different world, somehow, from the world of Monte Carlo, though it was made up of pleasure-seekers from many countries. There were smartly dressed women, pretty girls with tennis rackets, men in flannels, with Panama hats pulled over their tanned faces; men with fine, clear profiles, who had been soldiers; solemn judges on holiday; fat old couples who waddled from side to side, as if their legs were set on at the corners, like the legs of chairs and tables; thin, middle-aged ladies with long, flat feet which showed under short tweed skirts; ladies clothed as unalluringly as possible as if to apologize for belonging to the female sex; elderly gentlemen with superior, selfish expressions, and faces like ten thousand other elderly gentlemen who live in *pensions*, talk of their "well-connected" friends, and collect all the newspapers to brood over in corners, as dogs collect bones. There were invalids, too, in bath-chairs, and children playing with huge St. Bernards or Great Danes, and charming actresses from the Mentone Casino, with incredibly slim figures, immense ermine muffs, and miniature Japanese spaniels. Mary could see no reason why these people who promenaded and listened to the music should be different both individually and in mass from a crowd to be seen at Monte Carlo, yet the fact remained that they were

different; and among the faces there were none she knew, save those of the bird-like girl and her mother, half forgotten since the meeting in the train.

Hannaford took her by the Port, and past the old town whose heights towered picturesquely up and up, roof after roof, above the queer shops and pink and yellow houses of the sea level. Then came the East Bay, with its new villas and hotels, and background of hills silvered with olives; and at last, by a turn to the right which avoided the high road to Italy, they dipped into a rough path past a pebblé floored stream, where pretty kneeling girls sang and scrubbed clothing on the stones.

Two douaniers, one French, the other Italian, lounging on opposite sides of the little stream flowing down from the Gorge of St. Louis, told that this was the frontier. It was not the road to Italy that Mary knew, when once or twice she had motored over the high bridge flung across the dark Gorge of St. Louis on excursions to Bordighera and San Remo. Nevertheless they were in Italy, and a mysterious change had come over the landscape, the indefinable change that belongs to frontiers. The buildings were shabbier; yet, as if in generous pity for their poorness, roses and pink geraniums draped them in cataracts of bloom. Gardens were less well kept, yet somehow more poetic. The colour of the old plastered walls and pergolas was more beautiful here, because more faded, stained green with moss, and splashed with many flower-like tints born of age and weather

Always ahead, as Mary walked on with Hannaford, the high red wall of the Rochers Rouges glowed as if stained with blood where the sun struck it; and between the towering heights of rock and the turquoise sea he stopped her at an open-air restaurant roofed with palm leaves. There Hannaford ordered luncheon, at a table almost overhanging the water, and while the *bouillabaisse* was being made, he took her to the cave of the prehistoric skeletons.

Mary was interested, yet depressed. Life seemed such a little thing when she thought of all the lives that had passed in one unending procession of brief joys and tedious tragedies since those bones had been clothed with flesh and had caged hearts which beat as hotly as hers was beating now. "What does it matter," she said, "whether we are happy or not?"

"Does it not matter to ourselves?" Hannaford answered, rather than asked.

"Just at this moment, I'm not sure."

"Does it matter more about making others happy?"

"Perhaps. I should like to think that in my life I had made some others happy."

"I'm going to tell you by and by," he said, "how you can make one other very happy. It's just a suggestion I have to offer. There may be nothing in it."

He spoke rather dryly and perfunctorily, as he helped her down the stairs of the cave-dwellers' rock-

house. Mary had a vague idea that he meant to interest her in a "sad case," as he had done once or twice before, when he thought she needed to be "taken out of herself." She expected to hear a tale of some poor girl who had "lost all," and must be redeemed from disaster by a helping hand lest worse things happen; and as he was evidently determined not to tell his story then, Mary waited without impatience.

They were lunching early, and had finished before many people began to arrive dustily in carriages and automobiles. Hannaford had ordered his taxi at two o'clock, and there was no hurry. He told the Italian musicians to play softly, some simple old airs that he loved. Then, when Mary sat staring dreamily into the water, far down through clear green depths, he put his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands, and leaned across to her.

"Of course you know," he said, "that I love you. Don't speak yet — and don't look at me, please. Keep your eyes on the water. I told you I had something to ask; but it's not for your love I'm asking. I know that no woman, not even with your kind and gentle heart, could love a man like me. But something has hurt you. I told you once before that I didn't want to hear what it was. Only I'm afraid you're not happy, and perhaps — if the hurt was in your heart — you may never be happy again in exactly the old way, as a young girl is when she is full of hope. We feel alike about a lot of things, you and I. We are good friends. At least,

you look on me as your friend. And as for you, no man will ever be your friend, as you think of that word. I'm your friend to this extent, that you've given me back my interest in the world. I used to want to get out of it all, but I don't now, because you're in it. Anyhow, I don't want to go if you'll let me be of use to you — if you'll let me love you. Is it possible, dear, that you could think of marrying me — just in a friendly sort of way, you know, to have a protector, a man to look after you, and worship you, without any return except a little sympathy and kindness?"

Not once had Mary looked up at him, after the first fluttering glance of surprise when he began. Even when Hannaford stopped, and waited, she still kept her eyes on the water; but he saw that her hand trembled on the balustrade, and that a little pulse beat in her throat.

"I never thought!" she quavered, miserably.

"I know that, very well. I wouldn't believe most women who made such an excuse, after being as kind to me as you have been — a man like me! I should have thought you knew, and that you were playing, as the boys play with the frogs. But I realized from the first that you weren't going to 'think,' unless I put thoughts into your head. I wouldn't ask such a thing of you if you were happy, but you're not happy. I don't believe you know what to do with your future. You're not interested in things, as you were when you first came — except in the Casino, and that can't go on

forever. The sort of thing you're doing now eats a woman's soul away. Men can stand it longer than women. Almost anything else would be better for you. Even marrying me. Maybe you would take an interest in the place I've bought. It could be made so beautiful! You can't imagine the joy I've had in simply picturing you there."

"I should love to come — to see it — but only as your friend," Mary said, stammering guiltily, as if she were doing wrong in refusing him. "Oh, I can't tell you how sorry, how sorry I am!"

"You needn't be sorry," he answered. "I might have known what I wanted was too good to come true. I might have known I was beyond the pale. And I did know, in my heart. Only I had to find out, for sure. You mustn't mind. I wouldn't be without the memory of this day with you, anyhow — not for the world. It's good enough to live on for the rest of my life."

"But — you speak as if we weren't to see each other any more," said Mary. "Can't we go on being friends?"

"Yes. Wherever we are, we'll 'go on being friends.' But you may leave Monte. You probably will. And I — I shall be leaving too. Still, we'll 'go on being friends.' And the next favour I ask of you, if you possibly can, will you grant it?"

"Indeed I will," Mary promised eagerly. "Ask me now."

"Not yet. Not quite yet. The time hasn't

come. But it will before long. Then you must remember."

"I'll remember always." She stood up and held out her hand. He took it in his, and shook it heartily. His manner was so quiet, so commonplace, his face and voice so calm, that she could hardly believe that he really cared, that he really "minded much," as she put it to herself. Can a man shake hands like that with a woman, she wondered, if he is broken-hearted because she has refused him?

"Now we must go," she said. "I — shouldn't like to be late for my appointment."

"You shan't be late," he assured her, cheerfully. Then, just as they were moving away from the table, he stopped. "Will you give me one of those roses," he asked, "to keep for a souvenir?"

Their waiter had adorned the little feast with a glass containing a few short-stemmed roses. Mary selected the prettiest, a white one just unfolding from the bud, and gave it to Captain Hannaford. So quickly that no one saw, he laid it against her faintly smiling lips, then hid it inside his coat.

When the taxi had rushed up the upper Corniche and had taken the carriage road to Roquebrune, Mary said goodbye to Hannaford in the *Place* under the great wall of the old castle. She guessed that, perhaps, he would have liked an invitation to go with her to the curé's garden, which he had never seen. But she did not give the invitation. She even lingered, so that he must have seen she wished

him to drive away; and he took the hint, if it were a hint, at once.

"Goodbye," he said, pleasantly. "Thank you a thousand times, for everything."

"But it's I who have to thank you!" she protested.

"If I could think you would ever feel like thanking me for anything, I should be glad."

He released her hand, after pressing it once very hard; got into the taxi, gave the chauffeur the name of his hotel in the Condamine, and was whirled away. The last that Mary saw of him he was looking back, waving his hat as if he were saying goodbye for a long, long time.

XXIV

The big clock had just finished striking three when Mary entered the church of the old rock-town on the hill. She could feel the vibration of the last stroke, as if the heart of the church were beating heavily, in sympathy with her own.

Coming into the dimness after the golden bath of sunlight outside was like being plunged into night. For an instant all was dark before Mary's eyes, as if she had been pushed forward with her face against a black curtain. The once familiar perfume of incense came pungently to her nostrils, sweet yet melancholy, like a gentle reproach for neglect. She seemed to be again in the convent chapel of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake. Every well-known feature of the place was sharply visible; she saw the carved screen of black oak; the faces of Reverend Mother and the sisters, white and ardent in the starlike light of tall wax candles; she heard the voices of women singing, crystal clear, sweet and sexless as the song of angels. The old oppression under which she had panted in the last days of her novitiate fell upon her again, like a weight. She felt that her soul was in a strait-jacket. Then, as she had often felt — and prayed not to feel — while the pure voices soared, the sensation of being shut up in a coffin came back

to her. She was nailed into a coffin, lying straight and still under cool, faintly scented flowers; dead, yet not dead enough to rest. The terrible longing to burst the coffin lid and live — live — made her draw a deep, quick breath as of one choking, just as she had often struggled gaspingly back to realities after this obsession, while the singing went on in the dim chapel of the convent.

It began, and was all over in a few seconds. By the time her eyes had grown used to the twilight the impression of old, past things was gone; and relieved, as if she had waked from a dream of prison, Mary took note of everything round her: the largeness of the church, the effect of bareness, the simple decorations of the altar. She dipped her finger in the holy water, and knelt to pray for a moment, wondering if she had the right: and when she rose from her knees, the curé stood before her.

"Welcome, my daughter," he said. "I thought you were of the old faith. Now I am sure. Thank you for coming. I should like to give you my blessing before you go into the garden."

Presently he pointed to the open door which framed a bright picture of sky, and flowers growing against a low green and gold background of orange and lemon trees.

"Go out alone," he told her. "I have to stay here in church a while. Walk down the path to the wall, and look at the beautiful view. Then to the left you will see an arbour at the end of the garden.

Wait there for me. I shall follow before you have time to grow impatient."

He said nothing of Vanno, whom she had been brought there to meet, and to "save." Perhaps the Prince had not cared to come. This seemed very probable to Mary; yet the thought that he might be avoiding her did not stab the girl's heart with any sharp pang of shame or pain. A radiant peace had taken possession of her spirit, stealing into it unaware, as the perfume of lilies may take possession of the senses, before the lilies are seen. Though she felt gratitude and something almost like love for the curé, she was glad that he had sent her into his garden alone. The flowery knot pinned on the bare breast of mountain seemed even more to her than the "fairyland" Rose Winter had described. "Angel-land," she thought, as she saw how secret and hidden the bright spot was on its high jutting point of rock, with its guardian wall of towering, ivied ruin on one side, and the tall pale church on another. She felt that here was a place in which she might find herself again, the self that had got lost in the dark, somewhere far, far below this height.

She stood by the low wall which kept the garden from the precipice; and when she had looked eastward to Italy, and westward where the prostrate giant of the Tête de Chien mourns over Monaco, she turned toward the arbour in which the curé had told her to wait. Most of the big gold and copper grape-leaves had fallen now, but some were left,

crisped by frost until they seemed to have been cut from thin sheets of metal; and over the mass of knotted branches rained a torrent of freshly opened roses. They and their foliage made a thick screen, and Mary could not see the inside of the arbour; but as she reached the entrance Vanno stood just within, waiting for her, very pale, but with a light on his face other than the sunlight which streamed over him. Then Mary knew that something, more intimately herself than was her reasoning mind, had expected him, and had never believed that he would refuse to come.

He held out both hands, without a word; and without a word she gave him hers. He lifted them to his lips, and kissed first one, then the other. Still keeping her hands fast, he drew them down so that her arms were held straight at her sides. Standing thus, they looked into each other's eyes, and the glory of the sun reflected back from Vanno's almost dazzled Mary. Never in her life had she known happiness like this. She felt that such a moment was worth being born for, even if there were no after joy in a long gray existence; and the truth of what she had many times read without believing, pierced to her heart, like a bright beam from heaven: the truth that love is the one thing on earth which God meant to last forever.

"Will you forgive me?" Vanno asked, his eyes holding hers.

"Yes," she said. "And will you forgive me, for not forgiving you?"

"How could you forgive me, when you thought of me as you did? But you know now that you thought wrong."

"Yes. I know. Though I don't know how I know."

"And I know you to be *yourself*. That means everything. I can't say it in any other way. Because it was your real self I knew at Marseilles — the self I've known always, and waited for, and am unworthy of at last."

"Don't call yourself unworthy."

"I won't talk about that part at all — not yet. I love you — love you! and — God! how I need you."

"And I —— "

"You love me?"

He loosed her hands, and catching her up, lifted her off her feet, her slight body crushed against his, her head pressed back; and so he kissed her on the mouth, a long, long kiss that did away with any need of explanation or forgiveness. There was no returning afterward to the old selves again, they both knew before their lips had parted. It was as if they two had climbed to the top of a high tower together, and a door had been shut and locked behind them.

By and by he made her sit on the wooden seat under the rose canopy; and going down on one knee, he took up a fold of her dress and kissed it. No man but one of Latin blood could have done this and kept his dignity; but as he did the thing it was beautiful, even sacred to Mary, as if he knelt to pour balm on the wound that once he had given her.

Though his lips touched only her dress, the very hem of it, she felt the thrill of the touch, as she had felt his kiss on her mouth. This was her lover, and her knight. She half feared, half adored the thought that from this moment she had granted him rights; that a man loved her, and had kissed her, and that she had confessed to loving him. It was so different from anything which she had dreamed could come to her that she could hardly believe it was happening: for when she had left the convent she was still a nun in her outlook upon life.

Yet now this bowed dark head, and the rim of brown throat between the short, thick hair and the stiff white collar, looked somehow familiar, as if the man who knelt there had always been hers. So dear was the head, so boyish in its humility, that ridiculous tears rushed smarting to her eyes. She wanted to laugh and to cry. Where his lips had touched her dress, she almost expected to see a spark of light clinging, like a fallen star.

When he looked up and saw the tears, still kneeling he put his arms around her, and slowly drew her to him. Then her hands stole out to clasp his neck, her fingers interlacing, and she let her cheek lie softly against his. His face was hot as if the sun had scorched it, and she could feel a little pulse beating in his temple. There was a faint suggestion rather than a fragrance of tobacco smoke about his hair and his clothes, which made her want to laugh with a delightful, childish sense of amusement that mingled with the thrill of her love for him.

"You always belonged to me, you know," he said. "What time I have wasted, not finding you before! But I knew you existed. I knew always that I should meet you some day. And then I nearly lost you — but we won't talk of that, because you have forgiven me: and forgiving means forgetting, doesn't it?"

She answered only by pressing her face more closely against his.

"But there are other things for you to forgive," he went on. "I used to think I was very strong, not only in my body but in my will. Now I see that I can be weak. Can you love a man who does things he knows to be beneath him? I have made a fool of myself in the Casino — a fool like the rest. I began because I was miserable, but —— "

"Was it I who made you miserable?"

"Yes. But that is no excuse for me. I deserved it all and more: I'd hurt you. And afterward, I went on being a fool, because — it gave me a kind of pleasure, when I'd lost pleasure in other things. It's the weakness of it that I hate in myself, not so much the thing I did. A woman should have a man's strength to lean on, if she is to love him. Weakness is unpardonable in a man. Yet I'm asking you to forgive it, and let me begin over again."

"I love you as you are," Mary said. "What am I, to judge? What have I myself been doing?"

"You are a girl; and you are so young. You knew no better. I knew. You were led on. I walked into the trap with my eyes open."

"I was warned. My father just before he died wrote me a letter saying there was 'gambler's blood' in my veins. Those words always run in my head now. And a friend who loves me begged me not to come to Monte Carlo."

"It was Fate brought you — to give you to me. Do you regret it?"

"I don't regret anything — if you don't; because what is past — for both of us — doesn't feel real. This is the only real part. We were brought to Monte Carlo for this, it seems now."

"It seems, and it is."

They looked with one accord down at the Casino far below, which from the curé's garden had more than ever the semblance of a large, crouching animal. Its four horns glittered in the beginning of sunset, as if they were crusted with jewels of different colours. Its dominance over all that surrounded it, all that was smaller and less powerful and impressive than itself, was astonishingly evident from this bird's-eye point of view; but brightly as the jewels gleamed, they had lost their allurement for these two. With Vanno's arms around her, Mary wondered how she could ever have felt that the Casino was a vast magnet compelling her to come to it in spite of herself, drawing her thoughts and her money to itself, as an immense magnetic rock might draw the nails from the sides of a frail little boat. With

Mary's fingers warm and soft as rose-petals against his neck, her cheek on his, Vanno could have laughed with contemptuous pity at the wretched image of himself which he seemed to see down below, stupidly hurrying along with an offering for the Casino. He was not so much shocked at his own yielding to the attraction as he was surprised that there could have been so strong an attraction.

"Doesn't it look stupid down there?" Mary asked, almost in a whisper. "Like a lot of toy houses for children to play with?"

"And the children are tired of playing with them!" Vanno answered. "The toys there were only worth playing with when there was nothing better to do."

"That's it!" she echoed. "When there was nothing better to do. I think that was what the curé must have meant."

"The curé!" Vanno echoed. "I'd forgotten him!"

"So had I. How ungrateful of us. But you have made me forget everything except — *you*."

She rose slowly, reluctantly, and then pretended to exert her strength in lifting him up from his knees. "The curé stayed away on purpose," she said.

"Yes. For he meant this to happen — just as it has."

Mary smiled, half closing her eyes, so that the world swam before her in a radiant mist. She was less afraid of love and the man who gave and took it, now. Already it seemed that Vanno and she had always been lovers, not sad, parted lovers, but happy playmates in a world made for them. There



"'IT WAS FATE BROUGHT YOU — TO GIVE YOU TO ME.
DO YOU REGRET IT?'"

could not have been a time when they did not understand each other. Everything before this day had been a dream. "Do you know," she said, "why I came here — I mean, why the curé asked me? He told me that I must come and 'save' you. As if I could! It was I who needed saving."

"He knew," Vanno answered, speaking more to himself than to her, "that we should save each other."

As he spoke, a foot ostentatiously rattled the gravel of the path, at a safe distance. The curé coughed, and coughed again. A serious catching in the throat he seemed to have, for a man who lived in the fresh air and laughed at the notion of a "sunset chill."

Vanno took Mary's hand and kept it in his as he led her out of the arbour.

"This is what your blessing has done, Father," he said.

Then, the curé must have blessed him, too!

The priest smiled his good smile as he came toward them, the sky flaming behind his black-clad figure, like banners waving.

"I thought. I hoped. No, I knew!" And he smiled contentedly. "The stars have ceased to desire the moth, a well-known phenomenon which often upsets the solar system. The moth has lost its attraction. The stars have found each other."

"We have found each other," Mary said, "and I believe — I believe that we have found ourselves, our real selves."

"You have found yourselves and each other," echoed the curé, "which means that you have found God. I have no more fear" — and he waved a hand toward the towered building down below, set on fire by the sun — "no more fear of the moth."

XXV

They stayed on, after their friend had come to them; and all three sat together in the arbour, while the shadows hewed quarries of sapphire deep into the side of the mountains; and in the violet rain of twilight everything on land and water that was white seemed to become magically alive: the fishing boats turned to winged sea birds: the little waves were lilied with foam blossoms: the sky became a garden of stars.

When Mary first went to live at the convent, an impressionable child of eight, one of the nuns told her that the stars were spirits of children in heaven's nursery, sent out to play in the sky, that their mothers might see them and be glad: and the moon was their nurse. She repeated the legend to Vanno and the curé, and said that she had been brought up from childhood in a convent school, because she had lost her mother, and her father had gone away to India; but she did not say that she had taken the first steps toward becoming a nun. She wanted Vanno to hear this first, when they were alone together. Not that she feared the knowledge might endanger his love for her. In this immortal hour it seemed that nothing could ever again come between them.

"That accounts for what she is, does it not?" the curé exclaimed, turning to Vanno with the joy of the discoverer. "A convent school! Now, my son, what puzzled you in her is made clear. I, at least, might have guessed. A girl brought up by a band of good and innocent cloistered women must always be different from other girls. She should not be let out to wander alone in the world without guardians, as this child has been; for without a guide a few mistakes at the beginning are certain. Now, she has made all the mistakes she need ever make; and she is no longer alone."

"Never again!" Vanno said fervently, pressing her hand under the blue cover of dusk.

It did not occur to Mary that they both took her for a much younger girl than she really was. She had lived so entirely under the jurisdiction of those older than herself that in many ways she had remained a child. And she had begun by feeling still younger than before, after suddenly blossoming into independence. It was only since the night of Christmas, when the frost of unhappiness nipped the newly unfolded petals, that the flower had begun to droop. Now that dark time was already forgotten. She could hardly realize that it had ever been. In the joy of Vanno's love for her, and his old friend's fatherly kindness, she basked in the contentment of being understood, loved, taken care of; and she knew that she was a woman, not a child, only by the capacity to love a man as a woman loves. If she had said, "But I am nearly twenty-five,"

the two men would have realized at once that her school days must have ended long ago, even if prolonged beyond the usual time; and they would have asked themselves, if they had not asked her, where she had spent the years between then and now, in order to account for that ignorance of the world which to them explained and excused everything she had done at Monte Carlo. But it did not enter Mary's mind to mention her age.

"Upon some natures such teaching might not have made the same impression, of course," the curé went on, thoughtfully. "This dear child, it seems to me, has a very — how shall I express it? — a very old-fashioned nature. Nothing, I believe, could ever have turned her into one of those hard modern girls they are running up now like buildings made of concrete on steel frames. But the convent teaching has accentuated all in her that was already what I call 'old-fashioned.' And you, too, my Principino, you are old-fashioned!

"I?" exclaimed Vanno, surprised.

"Yes. You will suit each other well, you two, I prophesy. You have an old-fashioned nature: but do not think when I say that, I place you on a shelf at the back of the world's cupboard. All Romans, all Italian men, are old-fashioned at heart — and it is the heart that counts, though we do not always know it; and most of us would not like others to know it of ourselves. You have been much in the East, Principino, and you have learned to love the desert; but you would not have loved it

as you do were it not for the spirit of romance which keeps you old-fashioned under a very thin veneer of what is modern. I saw this in you when you were a boy and my pupil; and I must say it made me love you the better. It is perhaps the secret which draws the love of others toward you, without their knowing why, though it has caused life to jar on you often, no doubt, and may again. You would not, perhaps, have fallen into the mistake by which you hurt yourself and this dear child if you had not been old-fashioned. Don't you see that?'

"I suppose it is old-fashioned to have an ideal," Vanno admitted, laughing a little.

"Yes. And most old-fashioned of all, even I can see, are your ideas of women. So it is well you have fallen in love with one who is not modern."

"I know she is the Only Woman. But I grant that I may have picked up some Eastern ideas of what a woman's life ought to be. I must get rid of them, I suppose."

"You didn't 'pick those ideas up,' my son. They were in your blood. All the same, you may get rid of a few — a very few — with advantage. And safely too, because you are going to have an old-fashioned girl for your wife."

"I'm going to have her very soon, I hope," Vanno added, in a different tone.

Mary spoke not a word; and he did not press her then for an answer. But when the sudden darkness of the southern evening had warned them that it

was time to go, he began in the same strain again, after they had left the tunnelled streets of the rock-village. It was so dark that Vanno had the excuse of saving Mary a stumble on the rough cobblestones, as they went slowly down the mule path. He held her tightly, his arm around her waist. She walked bareheaded, trailing her hat in her hand; and the warm perfume of her hair came to him like the scent of some hitherto unknown flower, sweeter than any other fragrance that the evening dew distilled. "I want you to be my wife very soon," he said. "I must have you. And if you're as old-fashioned as the curé thinks, you won't say no to me when I tell you that. Shall he marry us?"

"Oh — that would mean it must be *dreadfully* soon!"

"Is there a 'dreadfully?' But — there's one thing, dearest, that I almost forgot. I must write to my father. Not that anything he could say would make any difference now; only I want him to love you, and our marriage to bring him happiness, not pain, even in the thought of it before he sees you. My brother Angelo has married lately, and he didn't let our father know till just before the thing was done. Perhaps it was not his fault. I can't tell as to that: there must have been a strong reason. But our father was deeply hurt; and it would be even worse with me, for he makes it no secret that I'm his favourite son. I believe I'm more like my mother than Angelo is. She was an Irish-American girl, and my father adored her: though sometimes I wonder if

he knew how to show his love. Anyhow, she died young, and he's been almost a recluse ever since. I'll write him at once — and I may even go to see him, though I can hardly bear to think of leaving you long enough for that. Still, it needn't be for more than three or four days and nights. I could go and come back in that time. I'll see! But if I do go, it must be to tell him we're to be married at once, from my brother's house."

"Your brother's house?" Mary repeated.

"Yes. Angelo has taken a villa at Cap Martin for the season. Perhaps you've seen it. He and my new sister-in-law went to Ireland to visit relatives of my mother, and to England afterward. They've been married more than two months; but I saw my sister-in-law for the first time on New Year's eve, the day they arrived. She's English, though she has lived mostly in southern Germany, I believe. She's an artist — does portraits beautifully, I hear, and was much admired in Rome, where she had come to paint, when my brother met her. I know very little of her except that she's pretty and charming — if any woman who is not *you* can be either. I'm sorry for all the men in the world, poor wretches, because there's only one you, and I've got you for mine, and I shall let them see as little of you as possible."

"That really *is* old-fashioned!" Mary laughed.

"Do you mind? Do you want to see them?"

"Not particularly. Because you have begun to make me feel the others aren't worth seeing."

"Angel!"

They both laughed, and Vanno was entranced when her heel slipped on a stone, and he could clasp her so tightly as to feel the yielding of her body against his arm. He would have liked to sing, the night was so wonderful, and all nature seemed to be singing. Distant bells chimed, silver sweet; frogs in hidden garden pools harped like bands of fairy musicians; and from everywhere came the whisper and gurgle of running water: springs from the mountains, pouring through underground canals to houses of peasants, who bought water rights by the hour.

As the two walked down the many windings of the mule path they met labourers coming up from the day's work in the country of the rich, far below. Some of the young men, clattering along in groups, joined in singing the strange tuneless songs, memories of Saracen days, which Vanno had heard on his first mountain walk. The old men did not sing. They climbed stolidly, with heads and shoulders bent, yet not as if discouraged by the thought of the long, steep way before them before they could rest at home. They had the air of taking life as it was, entirely for granted.

The darkness was bleached with a sheen of stars, and the pulsing beams that shot across the sky from the lighthouses of Cap Ferrat and Antibes. Here and there, too, an electric lamp dangled from a wire over the mule path, and revealed a flash of white teeth in a dark face or struck a glint from a pair of deep Italian eyes. But they were the eyes

and the teeth of young men, or of girls climbing with baskets of washing on their heads. The old men looked down, watching their own footsteps; and their stooping figures were vague and shadowy as ships that pass in the night, not to be recognized if seen again by daylight. Now and then a little old woman stumbled up the path, driving a donkey which tripped daintily along in silent primness, under a load of fresh-cut olive branches. The sound of the tiny feet on the stones and the swish of olive leaves against the wall added to the poetry of the night for Vanno, though he reflected that it was all commonplace enough to the donkeys and the women, who were as important as he in the scheme of things. After all, it was but a question of thinking!

Boys coming up from some late errand, played at being soldiers, and sprang out at each other from behind jutting corners of rock, imitating the firing of guns, or uttering explosive cries.

Vanno felt a great kindness for all the world, and especially for these people who — almost all of them — had the blood of Italy in their veins. He remembered the curé's saying with a smile that even now, if all Italians were banished from the French coast between Cannes and Mentone, the Riviera would be emptied of more than half its inhabitants; and it gave him a warm feeling in his heart to be surrounded by people of his own blood, at this moment of his great happiness. He would have liked to give these men something to make them happy also, for he knew that they were poor,

and that those who were most fortunate were those who worked hardest. Each shadowy figure, as it passed on its way up the mountain, gave out a faint odour, not disagreeable or dirty, but slightly pungent, and like the smell of iron filings: what Tolstoi called "the good smell of peasants."

The fire which had enveloped all Monte Carlo at sunset had burnt out long ago, but in the west a faint red-brown glow smouldered, as if a smoky torch had been trailed along the horizon. Monte Carlo and the Rock of Monaco rose out of the steel-bright sea like one immense jewel-box, or a huge purple velvet pincushion, stuck full of diamond and topaz headed pins, with here and there a ruby or an emerald. These lights, reflected in the water, trailed down into mysterious depths, like illuminated roots of magic flowers; and the bright shimmer spreading out over the moving ripples lay on the surface like glittering chain-armour.

Although they had the blaze of these amazing jewels always before their eyes, somehow in talking Mary and Vanno contrived to lose the way, descending to the high road nearer Cap Martin than Monte Carlo. It was six o'clock, and a long tramp home along the level, in the dust thrown up by motors and the trotting hoofs of horses, but in the distance a tram car coming from Mentone sent out a shower of electric sparks, like fireflies crushed to death between iron wheels and iron track. As the car advanced, Vanno stepped out into the road and hailed it. No *arrêt* was near, but the driver

stopped, with an obliging, French-Italian smile, and the two young people almost hurled themselves into empty seats at the first-class end of the tram.

Faces which had been inclined to frown at the illegal delay, even of six seconds, smoothed into good nature at sight of the handsome couple. Every one at once took it for granted that they were lovers. Mary's hair, ruffled by the hasty putting on of her hat, without a mirror, told the story of a stolen kiss to German eyes swimming with sentiment and romance — eyes which to an unappreciative world appeared incapable of either. Most of the eyes in this first-class compartment were German eyes, and some of the faces out of which they looked were round and uninteresting; but not all. German was the language being loudly talked across the car, from one seat to another; and a German mandate had caused all the windows and ventilators to be shut, in fear of that fatal thing, "a draught." English people sitting stiffly in corners, boiling with the desire to protest yet too reserved and proud to "risk a row," raged internally with the belief that their German neighbours were coarse, food-loving, pushing, selfish creatures who cared nothing for the beauty of the Riviera, and came only because of the cheap round trip, and the hope of winning a few five-franc pieces. The real truth was very different. The "pushing creatures" were selfish only because they were not self-conscious. They were as perfectly happy as children. They raved loudly in ecstasy over the beauty of everything, and were

blissfully ignorant that it was possible for any one to despise or hate them. Frankly they admired Vanno and Mary, staring in the unblinking, unashamed, beaming way that children have of regarding what interests them; and their kind, unsnobbish hearts went out to the young couple as no English hearts in the car went out.

Two persons sitting together at the other end, but on the same side as the newcomers, could not see what the pair were like, without bending forward and stretching out their necks. One of these, fired by the intense interest displayed on German faces, could not resist the temptation to be curious. She peered round the corner of a large, well-filled overcoat from Berlin, and saw Mary and Vanno smiling at each other, as oblivious of all observers as though they had the tram to themselves.

"You must take a peep, St. George," she said in her husband's ear, that she might be heard over the noise of the tram, without roaring. "It's that beautiful Miss Grant I told you about; and she's with the Roman Prince who invented the parachute Rongier used in the Nice 'flying week.' They are certainly in love with each other! They couldn't look as they do if they weren't. Perhaps they're engaged. Poor Dick! All his trouble for nothing."

"Why poor Dick?" inquired the Reverend George Winter.

"Oh, my dear Saint, don't put on your long-distance manner, and forget everything that hasn't a direct connection with heaven. But these two quite

look as if they'd just been up there by special aeroplane. Don't you remember my telling you, Dick's awfully in love with this girl, and took me to see her again yesterday, though she never returned my first call? But I was glad I went, because she was really sweet and charming, and I hated to think of her living in that deadly villa."

"Yes, I remember distinctly," said Winter, with a twinkle of humour in the eyes which seemed always to see things that no one else could see. "You told me when I was in the midst of writing a sermon, and had got to a particularly knotty point; so I tangled Dick and his love affairs into the knot, while trying to put them out of my mind. I'm afraid they didn't do my sermon much good. And beautiful as Miss Grant may be, I won't dislocate my neck to look at her in a tram. I advise you not to do so, either. Set our German friends a good example."

"Why is it the best of people always advise you not to do all the things you want to do, and vice versa?" observed Rose, pleased with her success in catching Mary's eye. They bowed to each other, smiling warmly. Vanno took off his hat, and Rose thought him exactly what a prince ought to be and generally is not.

"That's the wife of the English chaplain at Monte Carlo," Mary informed Vanno, in a stage whisper, "She's an American. She called on me yesterday; and only think, though she'd never seen me before, she said she would like me to visit her."

"Did you accept?" Vanno asked.

Mary shook her head. "No. It would have hurt Lady Dauntrey's feelings, perhaps. And besides, yesterday I — I thought of going away soon, to Italy — to Florence. I was travelling to Florence when suddenly it occurred to me to get off at Monte Carlo instead. Oh, how thankful I am now! Think, if we had never met?"

"We should have met. I was following you from Marseilles, you know, and watching to see where you got off. What can your people have been made of, letting you run about alone — a girl like you?"

"Oh, but I have no people — who count. Only such a disagreeable aunt and her daughter! I haven't written to them since I came here. I telegraphed, and gave no address. I shall not write — until — until —— "

"I know what you mean, though you won't say it. 'Until we are married.' You need not, unless you like, for they must have been brutes of women to have been disagreeable to you. But I wish you would stay with this lady — the chaplain's wife. Or else with my sister-in-law. I shall go to see her and Angelo to-morrow morning, and tell them about you. I'll ask them to call at once, and then — I feel almost sure — Marie will invite you to visit her. Would you accept? For that would be best of all. And in any case we must be married from their house."

"Marie!" Mary echoed the name, her voice dwelling upon it caressingly. "Marie! That was

the name of my — not my best, but my second best friend at school. We were three Maries. It will be good of your Marie to call on me; but she is a bride, and it's still her honeymoon. Do you think, if we — that is —— "

Vanno laughed. "If you put it in that way, I don't. No, if *we* were on our honeymoon I couldn't tolerate a third, if it were an angel. But it seems as if every one must want you."

"Hush! People will hear you."

Just then a party of three Englishwomen rose, and descended from the tram to go to a villa in the Avenue de la Vigie. This exodus left a vacancy opposite the Winters.

"Shall we move over there, before the tram gets going too fast?" Mary suggested. "I feel Mrs. Winter would like to talk to us."

Vanno agreed. He was anxious for the invitation to be renewed. And in a few moments after they had begun talking to the Winters across the narrow aisle, his wish was granted. Rose told her husband that she had asked Mary to stay with them, and ordered him to urge the suggestion.

"You see," Rose confided to her opposite neighbours, leaning far forward, her elbows on her knees, "I always try to have some perfectly charming person in our one little spare room, while the 'high season' is on, or else the most terrible bores beg us to take them in. People like that seem to think you have a house or an apartment on the Riviera for the sole purpose of putting them up for a fortnight

or so. It's positively weakening! We've just got rid of an appalling young man, whom my husband asked out of sheer pity: a schoolmaster, who'd come here for his health and inadvertently turned gambler. At first he won. He used to haunt my tea-parties, which, as we're idiotically good-natured, are often half made up of criminals and frumps. Extraordinarily congenial they are, too! The criminals are flattered to meet the frumps, and the frumps find the criminals thrilling. This was one of our male frumps: like an owl, with négligé eyebrows, and quite mad, round eyes behind convex glasses. He used to shed gold plaques out of his clothes on to my floor, because whenever he won he was in the habit of tucking the piece down his collar lest he should be tempted to risk it on the tables again. But at last there were no more gold pieces to shed, and his eyes got madder and rounder. And then St. George invited him to stay with us, in order that I might reform him. I did try, for I *was* sorry for the creature: he seemed so like one of one's own pet weaknesses, come alive. But after he threatened to take poison at the luncheon table, my husband thought it too hard on my nerves. I began to get so thin that my veils didn't fit; and George sent the man home to his mother, at our expense. At the present moment a soldier boy on leave — a Casino pet, whom all the ladies love and lend money to, and give good advice to, and even the croupiers are quite silly about, though he roars at them when he loses — is hinting to visit us, so that I may undertake

the saving of his soul, and incidentally what money he has left. But he carries a nice new revolver, and shows it to the prettiest ladies when they are sympathizing the most earnestly. And he has *no* mother to whom we can send him, if he attempts to add his pistol to our luncheon menu. Do, do save us from the Casino pet, dear Miss Grant. I've been holding an awful aunt of George's over the young man's head, saying she may arrive at any minute. But you know how things you fib about do have a way of happening, as a punishment, and I feel she may drop down on us if the room isn't occupied."

They all laughed, even the chaplain, whom Mrs. Winter evidently delighted in trying to shock. "I should like Miss Grant to be with you," Vanno said; and this — if she had not guessed already — would have been enough, Rose thought, "to give the show away." "I should like her to go to you at once, since you are so kind."

"Kind to ourselves!" Rose smiled. "Will you come, Miss Grant?"

Mary hesitated. "I should love it, but — I hate to be rude to poor Lady Dauntrey."

"If I hadn't dedicated my life to a member of the clergy, I know what I should want to say about Lady Dauntrey," Rose remarked, looking wicked. "Can't you, Prince — well, not *say* it, but do something to rescue Miss Grant, without damage to any one's feelings?"

"I mean to," Vanno answered. "I wanted her

to visit my brother and sister-in-law, but — they're on their honeymoon, and ——"

"I see," Rose interpolated. She did not volunteer the information that her own honeymoon was but just ended. Evidently it was to be taken quietly for granted that these two were engaged. She guessed that Prince Vanno had hinted at the truth in order that she should not misconstrue Mary's actions. He was almost forcing their relationship upon her notice, and her husband's notice, as if to justify his being with the girl unchaperoned.

"Not that we should have minded," Rose said to herself. "There's no room in St. George's 'thought-bag' for any bad thoughts, it's so cram full of good ones. And he's taught me how horrid it is, always rehearsing the judgment day for one's friends."

She threw a warm-hearted glance at her husband, valuing his kindly qualities the more because they two had just come from a tea-party, at a villa where the alternative to bridge had been telling the whole truth about people behind their backs, and digging up Pasts by the roots, as children unearth plants to see if they have grown. Luckily St. George had remained in blissful ignorance of the latter popular game. People showed only their best side to him, and made good resolutions about the other, while his influence was upon them.

"As for us," Rose went on, "we're quite a staid married couple, and I feel I'm intended by nature for the ideal chaperon — for a blonde like Miss

Grant. We shall look charming together, and though we mayn't make her comfortable, I guarantee to amuse her; for as a household we are unique. We live in an ugly, square apartment house — a kind of quadrupedifice — and our cook is in love, consequently her omelettes are like antimacassars; but I have a chafing-dish, and the most wonderful maid, and our tea-parties are famous — honeycombed with countesses and curates, to say nothing of curiosities. And my husband, though a clergyman, lets me go to all the lovely concerts where the dear conductor grabs up music by the handful and throws it in the faces of his orchestra. The only thing beginning with a C, which Miss Grant will have to miss with us, is — the Casino."

"I shan't miss that!" Mary exclaimed; then flushed brightly.

"Does that mean you will come?"

"Yes. It does mean that she will come," Vanno spoke for her.

"I think," remarked Rose, "that your future husband is a masterful person who intends you to 'toe the line.' But if it's his heart line, it will be all right."

"Perhaps," said Vanno, "for we are both very old-fashioned." He looked at Mary, and she at him. It was adorable to have little secrets that nobody else could understand.

Rose, dearly as she loved her husband, almost envied them for an instant: lovers only just engaged, with no cooks and housemaids and accounts

to think of: nothing but each other, and poetry and romance. Yet, she was not quite sure, on second thoughts, that she did envy them. Vaguely she seemed to see something fatal in the two handsome, happy faces; something that set them apart from the comfortable, commonplace experiences of the rest of the world.

"I think — after all I'd rather be myself than that girl," she decided.

XXVI

Vanno's way of atonement for continuing to live at Monte Carlo was to lunch or dine each day at the Villa Mirasole. On the first morning of his great happiness he was due there for luncheon at one o'clock, but having news to tell, he decided to go early. There was little danger of finding Marie and Angelo out, for they walked after an early breakfast, and generally spent the rest of the morning in their own garden, or on the covered loggia of the villa, which looked toward the sea. In the afternoon they sometimes took excursions in their motor-car, but they made no social engagements and never went to Monte Carlo, not even to the opera or concerts. This had struck Vanno as being odd; but soon he had taken it for granted that they cared for no society except each other's, which was after all quite natural.

Of late, Vanno's habit had been to dash over to Cap Martin at the last minute in a taxi and back again in the same hurried way, in order to give himself as much time as possible in the Casino; but this morning the Casino had seemed of no more importance to him than the railway station. It was as the curé had prophesied, for Vanno as for Mary: the absorbing new interest had pushed out the old, from

hearts in which there was room only for love. The other obsession was gone as if it had never been, as a cloud which broods darkly over a mountain top is carried away by a fresh gust of wind, leaving no trace on the mountain steeped in sunshine.

Instead of lying in bed until time to bathe and dress for the Casino, Vanno rose early, according to his old custom. It was as if he opened a neglected book at a page where a marker had been placed, and began to read again with renewed and increased interest. By nine o'clock he was at the Villa Bella Vista, asking for Mary, who had promised to see him. They had arranged that he was to tell Lord and Lady Dauntrey not only of their engagement, but of Mary's decision to leave their house for a visit to Mrs. Winter. She, however, had summoned unexpected courage and had already broken the news. It had seemed treacherous, she explained to Vanno, to go to bed and say nothing; so on an impulse she had told them all; and both had been kind.

Lady Dauntrey, who seldom appeared before ten o'clock—Casino opening time—was not only dressed but had breakfasted when Vanno came. She broke in upon Mary and the Prince in the drawing-room, seemed surprised to find them there, apologized laughingly, and with an attempt at tact congratulated Vanno. "I've got awfully fond of this dear girl," she said, looking Vanno straight in the eyes, a way of hers when people had to be impressed by a statement. "I think there's nobody like

her, and I — we — will miss her horribly. But you've a right to take her away. You can see her more comfortably, and everything will be better at the chaplain's than here. Quite a different atmosphere, I dare say! Only I hope she won't forget us. I've tried to do my best for her."

As she said this, a mist softened her hard eyes, and she ingeniously pushed the beginnings of tears back whence they came, with the lace edge of her handkerchief, fearing damage to her lashes. As she did this, Vanno noticed that her hands were extraordinarily secretive in shape and gesture. It seemed to him that they contradicted the expression of her decorative face, whose misty eyes and quivering lips had begun to disarm him, even to make him wonder if he had partly misjudged her. The hands, large and pale rather than white, appeared to curve themselves consciously in an effort to look small, pretty, young, and aristocratic, though they were in reality worn by nervousness, as if disappointments and harsh, perhaps terrible, experiences had kept them thin and made them old, though face and body had contrived to remain young. It was as if things the woman had known and endured had determined to betray themselves in some way, and had seized upon her hands. Suddenly it was as if Vanno had been given a key, and had heard a whisper: "This unlocks the secret of a woman's nature"; and he was almost ashamed of having used the key, even for an instant, as if he had peeped into a room where some one in torment was writhing in

silent passion. He said nothing of this, afterward, but he could not forget; and when Mary half guiltily praised Lady Dauntrey's warmth of heart and real affection, he was even more glad than before to take the girl away, He was glad, too, that Angelo and Marie would meet her for the first time at the Winters', not in the Dauntrey ménage.

To-day he did not dash off in a taxi to Cap Martin; but having taken Mary and a small instalment of her luggage to the Winters' apartment, sheer joy of life urged him to walk to his brother's. He was so happy that he felt like a mountain spring let loose in wind and sunshine, after being long pent up underground.

A short cut through the glimmering olive grove of the Cap led toward the Villa Mirasole, and plunging into the gray-green gloom he came suddenly upon the curé and two little acolytes, the boys robed in white and scarlet. Their figures moving under the arbour of old trees were like red and silver poppies blown by the wind, or wonderful tropical birds astray in the woods: and a glint of sunshine striking the censer was a thin chain of gold linking it to the sky.

To meet this little procession astonished Vanno, but the curé turned to smile at him without surprise. "Well met!" he said. "We are on our way to bless the villa. Last night after you went I received a letter from the Princess asking us to come this morning, as they are now quite settled. So here we are, these children and I. And I hoped

that you would be lunching with your brother and sister-in-law, for it is a pretty ceremony, the blessing. You will tell them to-day — what has happened?"

The curé slackened his pace, for a talk with his Prince, and the acolytes walked ahead, two brilliant little figures, whose robes sent out faint whiffs of incense-perfume.

"Yes. I've come early on purpose to tell," said Vanno. "But the first business is the blessing of the house. That will put them in a good mood. I hope you are going to lunch with us afterward?"

"Yes. The Princess has been so kind as to ask me, and I will stay. If you like, I can say good things of Mademoiselle, your charming fiancée."

"That is what I was thinking!" Vanno admitted. "Do you know, Father, I've been incredibly stupid. You will hardly believe it when I tell you — but I have not yet found out her Christian name."

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed the curé. "You did not ask? But, my Principino, it is impossible. What did you call her?"

"If you must know, I called her 'Angel,' and 'Darling,' and perhaps a few other things like that. Any other name seemed quite unimportant at the time: but after I'd left her this morning at Mrs. Winter's (where she is going to visit, thank heaven!) it flashed into my mind that I'd never heard her name. It begins with 'M,' that's all I know. I couldn't very well rush back, ring the door bell, and inquire. I must find out somehow now without

asking, as it's too absurd, when we've been engaged since yesterday afternoon."

Talking, they came near the edge of the olive wood, where a narrow lane divided the olives from a sea of pines. The white main road in the distance was empty, and silent with the digestive silence of Riviera thoroughfares at noon, when all the world, from millionaire to peasant, begins to think of the midday meal. Even motors were at rest, comfortably absorbing petrol and leaving the roads to sleep in peace. Far off among the trees Vanno caught a glimpse of two men picnicking, cabdrivers eating their bread and meat and drinking the rough red wine of the country, while their little *voitures* stood a few yards away, the horses well in shade, their faces buried in nose-bags, and a miniature wolf-like dog asleep on the back of one. As Vanno and the priest drew nearer both men got up respectfully, wiping their smiling mouths. They seemed not at all astonished to see the figures in scarlet and white, with the swinging censer. And indeed it was a common enough sight in these woods, and elsewhere, the brilliant little procession for the blessing of houses, or for the last sacrament. The curé knew both men, for his parish extended from the old village of Roquebrune down to the outskirts of Mentone on one side and to St. Roman on the other. He asked one after a new wife, and of the other inquired for the health of his tiny dog, Pomponette. Nothing would do but the microscopic animal must be fetched from her ample bed on the

horse's back, and displayed proudly. Her master, a very large dark man, stuck the dog into the breast of his coat, whence her miniature head protruded like a peculiar orchid.

"*C'est un bon garçon*," remarked the curé, when the bowings and politenesses were over, and they had got away. "A strange world this! He is the last of one of the greatest and oldest families of Southern France. For generations they have been in ruin, reduced to the life of peasants. Jacques cares not at all, and hardly remembers that he has in his veins blood nobler than some kings can boast. What would you? It is as well for him. We are not snobs, we southerners, Principino. And he is quite happy, with his little cab, his little white horse, and his little dog. He will marry a peasant — I think I know who, for she has embroidered a blanket for Pomponette. At one time he was conductor on the trams; but he was *triste* because few of the passengers said good morning or good evening to him — and he is a friendly fellow. So he gave up his position on the trams. One would not find that in the north. They have their faults, these people, but I love them."

The woods of Cap Martin seemed to be populated by the curé's friends. As he and Vanno walked away from the picnickers, a woman, bareheaded, carrying a large basket, came toward them, followed by a very old man with his arms full of bundles. She too was of the peasant class, a noble creature past her youth, with the face of a middle-aged Madonna, and the bearing of a Roman matron of distinction. The

old man, whose profile was clear as that of a king on a copper coin, was deeply lined and darkly sunburnt. His head, bald no doubt, was tied up in a crimson handkerchief that gave him the value of a rare picture by the hand of some old master. Seeing the curé, the pair stopped under an immense olive tree, a tree so twisted, so contorted that it seemed to have settled down to treehood only after the wild whirl of a mænad dance. Now in its old age, which had been youth in Cæsar's day, it was more like a gray, ruined tower than an olive tree. It had divided itself into a few crumbling, leaning walls with sad oriel windows and a broken ornamentation of queer gargoyles. Behind the woman with the basket and the old man with the red handkerchief was the distant background of the Prince's garden, like a drop curtain at a theatre: a wall overgrown with flowering creepers; the delicate tracery of wrought-iron gates between tall pillars; bare branches of peach and plum trees, pink as children's fingers held close before the fire, or the hands of Arab girls after the henna-staining; and two cypresses, close together, rising against the blue sky with pure architectural value. As they hurried along, the man and woman crushed under foot, without knowing what they did, the sheeny brown curves of wild orchids, "Jacks in the pulpit," that were like little hooded snakes rearing heads in rage, to guard the baby violets sprouting in the grass.

"This is Filomena, the cook I myself secured for your brother's house," said the curé; "the best cook

and one of the best women on the coast. See, she is carrying our luncheon in her big basket. That shows how early you are, Principino. She is just back from the market at Mentone, where I'll warrant she was delayed by some nice bit of gossip. They love the marketing, these good creatures."

The woman, smiling charmingly, reached out a brown and shapely hand, rather workworn, which the curé shook, and proceeded to make her known to the Prince. Without hesitation or embarrassment she put out her hand to him also. In his, it felt hard and rough, yet glowing with health. It was quite a matter of course to Filomena to be introduced to the Prince, the brother of her new, exalted master, whom she had not until now had the pleasure of seeing, although she had cooked for him already many times. She remarked on this fact, with her bright, engaging smile. Her manner was perfectly respectful, yet free from servility. It would not have occurred to her that any one could have considered her little conversational outburst a liberty; and she proceeded to introduce the old man as her father.

"He has eighty-two years," she said, with a glance from the Prince to the curé, "yet he thinks little of walking down from our old home far, far away in the mountains in Italy, to pay me a visit. It was a surprise this time, his coming. I met him near the market, and profited by getting him to help with my parcels. Will Messieurs the Prince and Curé figure to themselves, he married my mother

when their two ages together would not make thirty-five, and there in the mountains they brought up eight of us. But, after the marriage, they were still children. It was necessary for the priest to explain to my father why it is that the good God ordained marrying. And look at him now!"

She laughed gayly, and the old man, who could speak only a *patois* from over the frontier, cackled without understanding what his daughter said. He guessed well that he was the subject of the conversation, and jokingly he reproved the middle-aged Madonna with a few toothless mutterings more like Latin than Italian, more Arabic than either.

"And now, Messieurs," Filomena finished, "we must be hurrying on, or the *déjeûner* will be late. That would make me so angry, I should poison all the fishes if I were thrown into the sea! How Monsieur the Prince is handsome, and like my *patron* — yet different, too! Ah, it does seem to me, begging Monsieur the Curé's pardon, that now-a-days the good God is becoming more experienced and therefore fashioning finer men. When He first began, He was but young and had no practice, so it is not strange if He made mistakes."

"You people of this country are very free with the great name of your Creator," remarked the curé, but not too sternly. "Think, Principino, I have heard this very Filomena saying that after Christmas it is safe to sin a little, for the enfant Jesus is so very small He takes no notice; and between Good Friday and Easter He is dead, so then again there is

a chance. It is well that I know you mean no sacrilege, Filomena, or I should have to scold — and to-day that would be a pity, for it is a day of good omen for us all."

"Ah, yes," agreed Filomena. "Monsieur the Curé is to bless the house."

"Not only that, but his Highness here has come with great news to tell. He is going to marry a beautiful young lady."

"Then is the blessing a double one. I am sure the young lady must indeed be beautiful if she is worthy; perhaps even as beautiful as the Princess, my mistress."

"Quite as beautiful, Filomena. But you are the first one to have the news. You must not go and tell. Leave that to the Prince."

"Indeed, Monsieur the Curé need have no fear. I've my *déjûener* to cook. And I shall make something extra in honour of the great occasion." So, with a flash of white teeth and a bow no duchess could have bettered, Filomena went off about her business, followed by that aged patriarch, her father.

Three minutes after the pair had disappeared through the *porte de service*, Vanno and the curé arrived at the great gate, which was a famous landmark at Cap Martin, the Villa Mirasole having been built years ago for a Russian grand duke. Since he had been killed by a bomb in his own country, the house he loved had passed into other hands. Now it belonged to an English earl who had lost a fortune at the Casino: and it was owing to his losses

that the villa was let this season to Prince Della Robbia.

Much of the furniture, which was of great value, had been sold, and the house was so denuded that it had practically to be redecorated and refurnished, to suit Angelo's ideas of fitness for his wife; because he wished to keep it on year after year. Only to-day was everything finished to his satisfaction.

The villa, whose exterior copied the Petit Trianon, had a large entrance hall of marble which opened to the roof, and was surrounded by a gallery. This hall was coldly beautiful, with its few bronzes and gilded seventeenth-century chairs, its tall vases of orange blossoms and tea roses, its faded Persian rugs and mosaic tables. But it made an extraordinarily impressive background or frame for a lovely woman, and Marie Della Robbia was a lovely woman. Vanno had seen her many times now in many different dresses since New Year's eve, when he had met her with Angelo, at the Mentone railway station; but she had never struck him as being a beauty, until to-day. As she came forward to greet her two visitors, he said to himself for the first time that she was beautiful.

She and Angelo had evidently just entered from the garden. Her right hand was full of roses, which she hastily changed into her left, and she wore a softly folding white dress, with a great cart-wheel of a Leghorn hat, drooping in all the right places, and wreathed with pink roses. She was a tall woman with a long neck, therefore could well wear such a

hat; and it framed her head like an immense halo of dull gold. Her hair was brown with red lights in it, and her eyes were of exactly the same shade, the colour of ripe chestnuts. She had a beautiful short, rather square face, of a craemy paleness; a square, low forehead, straight dark brows, drawn very low over the long eyes; a short, straight nose, and a short, curved upper lip, fitting so charmingly into the full squareness of the under lip that her mouth looked like two pieces of pink coral cleverly carved one upon another. Her short, square chin was deeply cleft, and her long yet solid-looking white throat was like one of those slender marble columns which divide the arch of a Moorish window. At first sight, before she spoke, she would be taken for a woman of sensuous temperament, lazy, luxury-loving, not talkative, and the gay smile which flashed over her face at sight of Vanno and the curé seemed somehow unsuited to it, giving almost the effect of electric light suddenly turned upon a still pool, covered with the waxen weight of white water-lilies. Her manner, too, was a contradiction of her type. It had a light, sleigh-bell gayety, bringing thoughts of sparkling snows and iced sunshine. There was charm in it, yet it was oddly remote and cold, as if she, the woman herself, had gone away on an errand, leaving some other woman's spirit in temporary charge of her body. She looked to be twenty-five or six, and was meant by nature to be more dignified than she chose to be. She had elected to be light and girlish; and whatever

she was, it was evident that in her husband's eyes she was perfect. He watched her admiringly, adoringly, as she welcomed her brother-in-law and the curé. The love in his eyes was pathetic, and would have been tragic if it had not been a happy love, fully returned, and culminating in a perfect marriage.

Angelo was delighted to see his brother, and especially to see him come in with their old friend the curé. This meant, he hoped, that the good man had found a chance to talk to Vanno, and perhaps to persuade him to stay at the Villa Mirasole.

The two young men shook hands cordially, with an affectionate grip, as if they had not seen each other for some time, though it was really no more than twenty-four hours since they had parted.

They were very much alike, and yet, as Filomena had shrewdly noticed at first glance, utterly different. Angelo was five years older than Vanno and looked more, because he wore a short pointed beard, cut almost close to the long oval of his cheeks, like the beards of many Italian naval officers. He was dark, but not so dark as Vanno's face had been painted by the desert; and whereas Vanno was both man of action and dreamer, Angelo had the face of a poet whose greatest joy is in his dreams. He seemed less Roman, more Italian than Vanno, and his profile was less salient, more perfect, being so purely cut that people who had seen him seldom, would think of him in profile, as one thinks always of a sword. Vanno would dream, and strenuously work out his

dream. Angelo would dream on, and let others work; consequently the elder was not so vital, not so magnetic as the younger. He showed no trace of those battles with himself which gave Vanno's face strength and his eyes fire; yet it was clear that Angelo was a man of high ideals, and would be lost in losing them; whereas Vanno would fight on without ideals, only becoming harder. All this the curé had known since Angelo was a big boy and Vanno a little one, and he had learned it after an acquaintance of but a few days, for it was a theory of his that character is like the scent of various plants. It must so distil itself that it cannot in any way be hidden for long; and those who cannot recognize character for what it is are like people who have lost their sense of smell, and can detect no difference in the odour of flowers.

Almost at once the Princess proposed that the curé should begin to bless the house. He had brought with him a small olive branch which he had gathered in the woods; and with this he sprinkled each room with holy water, while the acolytes accompanied him, one holding a bowl, the other swinging the censer which sent clouds of perfume through the house. All the servants had been called together, even the Princess' English maid, who had left England for the first time to come to the Riviera. They followed the family from room to room, grave and deeply interested, Filomena in a large white apron exhaling a faint odour of spices and good things of the kitchen. When the ceremony was finished and not a room unvisited, Filomena flew back to duty,

and carefully, but not anxiously, lifted the lid of each *marmite* on the huge stove. She had possessed her soul in perfect confidence that the patron saint of the household would look after her dishes during her absence, and she would have been not only surprised but indignant if anything had been burnt.

Now had come the moment for Vanno to speak.

The curé had sent away the acolytes. It still wanted half an hour of luncheon time, and the Princess led the way to a wide window-door on to the loggia. This was very broad, like an American veranda, with a roof of thick, dull greenish glass which softened the glare of sunlight, and did not darken the rooms inside. Roses garlanded the marble pillars, and Indian rugs were spread on the marble floor. There were basket chairs and tables, and a red hammock piled with cushions was suspended on bars arranged after a plan of Angelo's. Marie Della Robbia in her white dress made a picture among the crimson cushions, and it was scarcely possible for her not to know that the three men who grouped round her found the picture charming.

Vanno's heart was thumping. He had thought it would be easy and delightful to tell the news of his engagement, but it struck him suddenly that these two, Angelo and Marie, were utterly absorbed in each other. Perhaps they would not care as much as he had hoped. Or Angelo might disapprove. Not that any disapproval would matter now, not even their father's; but Vanno wanted sympathy and interest. As he searched for the right word to begin,

groping for it, ashamed of his shyness, the butler appeared at the window, a Mentonnais-Italian who prided himself passionately upon his English. He too had been found for the house by the friendly offices of the curé — an eager, intelligent man with glittering eyes and a laughable tendency to blushing. He had learned his English in three months at a Bloomsbury boarding-house where, apparently, conversations had been carried on entirely in slang. If he were addressed by an English-speaking person in any other language, his feelings were so deeply wounded that he turned a rich purple.

"Highnesses please," he announced, "a French mister has come to appear. It is a Stereo-Mondaine and he have a strong want to prend some photographs of the garden and peoples which is done from colours already, very rippin'."

Angelo frowned slightly. And when he frowned his long oval face looked cold and proud, the face of an aristocrat who believed that the world was made for him and his kind. "Tell the man that we cannot allow him to take photographs here," he said.

The butler hesitated. "Highness, it is necessary that this man vivre. I think he has not too much oof. *C'est dure, la publicité!*"

"I can't help that, Americo," Angelo persisted. "You can offer him food if you think he is poor, but we do not want him to take photographs."

Vanno saw that Marie was looking at her husband intently, with a peculiar, almost frightened expression, as if she were studying him wistfully, and find-

ing out something new which she had not wholly understood.

"Angelo," she ventured, in a small, beguiling voice, "perhaps this poor man has his pride of an artist. You see, I have a fellow feeling!" She smiled pleadingly, yet mischievously, and turned an explanatory glance on the curé. "I was an artist, and I should so love to know what is a Stereo-Mondaine."

Vanno had never before liked her so much.

Angelo's face changed and softened. "If you want him, it is different!" he returned. "But you've seemed always to have a horror of snapshotters."

"He might take the garden," she suggested.

"Bring the fellow, Americo," said Prince Della Robbia.

The butler flushed furiously with joy. "Rightho, my good Highnesses," he exclaimed; and the three who understood why he was funny stifled laughter till he was out of earshot. "His English is a constant delight to us," said Marie, instantly picking up again her sleigh-bell gayety of manner, like a dropped, forgotten garment. "It's as wonderful as my English maid's French, which she's earnestly studying, though she finds that a language where meat is feminine and milk masculine simply doesn't appeal to her reason. She's learned to call Wednesday 'Mur*cree*dy' and Saturday 'Samdy.' When she goes to Mentone to buy me something at Aux Dames de France, she says she's bought it at

the 'Ox Daimes.' But she reached her grandest height this morning. I walked into my room, to hear her groaning at a window that looks toward Monte Carlo. 'Oh, those poor, poor men committing suicide! I can't get them out of my head,' she moaned when I asked if she were ill. 'That day when I went over there sightseeing. It was too awful, walking on the terrace, to hear those poor creatures blowing out their brains every two minutes down under the Casino. I couldn't stand it, so I had to come away, but nobody else seemed to mind, and some of 'em was hanging over the wall to see what was going on!' I couldn't imagine what she meant, for a minute. Then I knew it must be the pigeon-shooters."

Angelo laughed. "Of course. But what do *you* know of the pigeon-shooters, Marie mia? You have sternly refused to let me take you to Monte Carlo."

Marie blushed, a sudden bright blush. "Oh, you have told me about them — how they shoot under the terrace. That's one reason why I love staying here at Cap Martin, or taking excursions where everything is purely beautiful, and nothing to make one sad."

"I don't remember telling you about the pigeon-shooting," Angelo said.

"Well, if you didn't tell me, somebody else must have, mustn't they — else how could I know?"

"Highnesses, Mister the Stereo-Mondaine."

A frail wisp of a man was ushered by the butler on to the loggia: a man very shabby, very thin, very

proud, with a camera out of proportion to his size and strength, hugged under one arm. He would have been known as a Frenchman if found dressed in furs at the North Pole.

He explained passionately that, had he been a mere photographer, he would not have ventured to intrude upon such distinguished company; but he was unique in his profession, a Stereo-Mondaine, a traveller who knew his world and had a *metier* very special. He was, in short, an artist in colour photography; and before asking the privilege that he desired, he would beg to show a sample of his most successful work at Monte Carlo.

"Here, for instance," he went on hurriedly in his French of the Midi, "is a treasure of artisticness; a marvel of a portrait, a poem!" And he displayed a large glass plate, neatly bound round the edges with gilt paper. His thin hand, on which veins rose in a bas relief, held the plate up tremulously against the light. All bent forward with a certain interest, for none of the three had seen many specimens of colour photography. Vanno and the curé both gave vent to slight exclamations. They were looking at a picture of Mary Grant, dressed in pale blue, with a blue hat. She was standing in the *Place* of the Casino at Monte Carlo, feeding pigeons.

It seemed to Vanno that his sister-in-law also uttered a faint, "Oh!" But turning to her, he saw that she was leaning back among the cushions of the hammock, having ceased to take an interest in the prettily coloured photograph. She met his eyes.

"I thought I heard Americo coming to call us to luncheon," she said. "It must be nearly time. But it wasn't he, after all. Yes, indeed, it is a charming photograph." Breaking from English into French, she complimented the Stereo-Mondaine.

"Will you sell me that picture?" Vanno asked.

"But, Monsieur, it is my best. I should have to demand a good price; for it could be produced in a journal, and I would be well paid. When the plate of a coloured photograph is gone — biff! *all* is gone. There is an end."

"I will give you three louis."

The Stereo-Mondaine accepted at once, lest the Monsieur should change his mind; and Vanno having taken the plate from him, he proceeded to produce others.

"Nothing more, thanks — unless you have any of the same lady."

"No, unfortunately, Monsieur. She would have posed again, for she was a most sympathetic as well as beautiful personality. But the crowd closed around us. I may induce her to stand again, however."

"I hardly think that is likely to happen," Vanno muttered.

"Let him go into the garden, and take half a dozen of the prettiest views — things we should like to carry away with us," the Princess said, hastily, as if she were anxious now to be rid of her protégé. "When they are ready, he can send them to us — and the bill."

The Stereo-Mondaine was disposed of, while Angelo took the glass plate from Vanno, and looked at the picture.

"Do you know the lady, by any chance," he asked lightly, "or did you buy merely as an admirer of beauty?"

"I — am going to marry her, I hope," said Vanno. "We have been engaged since last night. I came over early to tell you."

There was a pause. Each one seemed waiting for another to break the silence. Then the curé stepped into the breach.

"I speak from knowledge when I say that the Principino's fiancée is as good as beautiful — a most rare lady. He is to be congratulated."

"Of course we congratulate him!" Angelo said cordially. He got up and shook hands warmly with his brother, like an Englishman: then he patted him affectionately on the shoulder. "Dear boy," he added, "you have given us a great surprise. But I am sure it is a happy one. And we can feel for you because of our own happiness, which is so new: though I think it always will be new. Can we not sympathize, Marie mia?"

"Yes," said the Princess. "Yes, of course. I congratulate you." There was a different quality in her voice. It did not ring quite true; and Vanno was disappointed. He thought that to please Angelo and him she was affecting more interest than she was able to feel.

Angelo still had the coloured photograph on the glass plate, but now he handed it to his wife. "What a lovely girl!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe that in your artist days, dearest, you ever had a prettier model."

"No, never," said Marie. She took the plate that Angelo held out, and looked at it with a slight quivering of the eyelids as if the sun, which was very bright, shone too strongly. Then, quickly, she sprang up, leaving the photograph in the hammock. "An awfully pretty girl," she went on. "Vanno must tell us all about her, at luncheon. Here comes Americo to announce it."

She hurried to the door, smiling at the three men over her shoulder. The sun had given her a bright colour. Even her ears were rose-pink. Vanno, in following, retrieved the glass plate from among the cushions. He was not sure whether or no his announcement had been a success, but the method of it seemed to have been thrust on him by Fate.

For a few minutes after they were seated at the table Marie chatted of other things, talking very fast about a *Blinis au caviar* for which she had given Filomena the recipe. "I tasted it first in Russia," she remarked, immediately adding "when I was very young." Then abruptly she jumped back to the subject of Vanno's great news. "Tell us about *her*," she commanded, giving her brother-in-law a charming smile. But as he began, rather jerkily, to supply the information asked for, the Princess looked down at her plate, eating slowly and daintily,

as a child eats when it wishes to make some delicious food last as long as possible. Not once did she raise her thick, straight eyelashes, as Vanno said that the girl was a Miss Grant, now staying with the wife of the chaplain at Monte Carlo. Her first question seemed to have satisfied the Princess' curiosity, for all those that followed were asked by her husband.

"Miss Grant!" he echoed, deeply interested in his brother's love affair, though still puzzled by its suddenness, and a little uneasy. He felt that it would not be well for both the Duke's sons to marry women unknown socially; and almost unconsciously he was influenced by a selfish consideration. Vanno was expected to make his, Angelo's, peace with the father, who worshipped the younger, tolerated the elder, of his sons. It was Vanno's duty to describe Marie in glowing terms, to induce the Duke to feel that despite her social unimportance she was a pearl among women. But if Vanno had his own peace to make, his own pearl to praise, other interests might suffer. "Miss Grant! It is odd, isn't it, that we should choose girls of names so much alike? Marie Gaunt, and — but what is your Miss Grant's Christian name?"

Vanno had to confess ignorance; and this forced him to explain that he had known Miss Grant for a very short time. "But I felt from the beginning that I'd known her always," he added bravely. "It was — love at first sight. You — I think you'll understand when you see her. The curé sees. And

that's what I want to ask. Will you both go to call upon her with me — and be kind?"

"Of course," said Angelo. "It can't be too soon. When shall we go?"

"Well," said Vanno, almost shamefacedly, "I thought if you could manage it this afternoon ——"

Angelo laughed a pleasant but teasing laugh. "He doesn't want any grass to grow between Cap Martin and Monte Carlo before our motor-car has rushed us to his lady's bower. We can go this afternoon, I'm sure, can't we, Marie?"

The eyes of the three men were turned upon the Princess, who was still delicately eating her *Blinis au caviar*, though the others had finished. For an instant she did not answer. Then she looked up suddenly, first at Angelo, her glance travelling to Vanno almost pleadingly before she spoke. "I should love to go," she said to him, emphatically. "Only, I do think it would be so much more proper and better in every way for me to call on — on Miss Grant first alone, without either of you. Do let me. It will be far more of a compliment, I assure you. And she will prefer it."

"I don't quite see that," observed Angelo.

"Because you are a man! Why, she can talk to me, and tell me little confidential things that she will love telling, and couldn't so much as mention before you. Vanno says she has no relatives with her, but is staying with friends; and I will try to make her feel as if I were a sister."

"Marie, you *are* good!" exclaimed Vanno, his

eyes warm with gratitude. After all, his sister-in-law was not disapproving, as he had begun to fear. "She's perfectly right, Angelo. It will be splendid of her to go alone."

"I begin to see the point of view," said Angelo. "I might have known. She's always right."

Marie smiled at him sweetly and softly; and as her husband's eyes met hers a beautiful look of love and understanding flashed from the hidden soul of the woman to the soul of the man. Vanno saw it, and thrilled. So would it be with him and the girl he loved.

XXVII

THE motor was ordered for the Princess at a quarter to three. She wished to arrive early at Mrs. Winter's, in order to have her chat with Miss Grant before tea time. Her idea was to ask only for the guest, not for the hostess, and be ready to leave before the hour when extraneous and irrelevant guests might be expected to invade the chaplain's drawing-room. There was, it appeared, a telephone in the apartment-house where the Winters lived, and Vanno, getting into communication with Mary after numerous difficulties, begged her to be in, and if possible alone, for a visit from his sister-in-law. It was arranged that the curé, who had never been in a motor-car, should be dropped at the foot of a convenient short cut to Roquebrune, and Angelo and Vanno would go on with Marie to Monte Carlo. Having left her at the Winters' door, Angelo meant to walk with Vanno to his hotel, expecting later to pick up his wife again. When the curé had bidden them goodbye, however, Marie proposed a modification of the plan.

"Poor Angelo has been pining for Monte Carlo, I'm sure," she said, laughing, her bright eyes and unusually pink cheeks alluring and mysterious, under the thickly patterned black veil she had put on with

a large black velvet hat. "He's concealed his feelings well, I must say, out of compliment to me, because I was so good about the villa. At first I didn't want to have a house at Cap Martin. From all I'd heard, I thought the Riviera must be so sophisticated — and somehow I've always detested the idea of Monte Carlo. But you know, Vanno, how Angelo fell in love with the Villa Mirasole when he visited the Grand Duke years ago. He must have written you how he set his heart, even then, on having it for his honeymoon if he married. I gave up my objections provided he would promise that I needn't go to Monte Carlo, and that he wouldn't be always running over there himself. Now, I'm glad, for I love the villa. And you see, I'm on the way to Monte Carlo of my own accord! The next thing is to tell Angelo he may play about there as long as he likes. I shall keep the motor waiting while I'm at Miss Grant's, and go back in it alone whenever I feel inclined. You needn't come to fetch me. I'd rather not."

Both men looked disappointed: Vanno because he wanted to hear Marie's impressions of his adored one without delay, confident that they would be favourable; Angelo, because since their marriage he and his wife had not been parted for a single hour. This was the first sign Marie had shown of wishing to assert independence.

"Are you sure you're not saying this for my sake?" Angelo inquired anxiously. "I don't want to hang about Monte Carlo. I ——"

"It will do you good to have a little change," she said. Then she flashed him a meaning, intimate glance which he thought that he interpreted, and therefore raised no more objections. Her eyes seemed to say: "I have a reason. I'll explain to you when we're alone. It has something to do with your brother."

"Come and dine with us if you care to, Vanno," she went on. "Or if you have an engagement with Miss Grant, spin over in a taxi for coffee and a few minutes' chat afterward. That is, if you'd like to hear how beautiful and altogether perfect I think she is — and make some plan about bringing her to Cap Martin — sooner or later."

Vanno explained that he was to dine at the Winters, but would accept for the "chat," with great pleasure. Dinner was early at the chaplain's. He would leave at eight-thirty, and then go back again for a quarter of an hour, to bid Miss Grant farewell.

He leaned suddenly from the window just in time to direct his brother's chauffeur, and the car pulled up before the ugly square building which Rose Winter called a "quadrupedifice." Angelo sprang out, helping Marie to alight with as much care and tenderness as if she might break with a rough touch. Next came the parting at the door; and Vanno smiled to see how Marie lingered with her hand in her husband's. They had as many last words to say to each other as if Angelo were to be absent for three days, although he was assuring her — with

needless insistence — that even if he looked into the Casino he would certainly be back long before dinner.

The two men watched the Princess begin to mount the stairs, before they turned away. Then, leaving the car at the door as Marie had wished, they walked off together in the direction of the Hôtel de Paris.

"Idina Bland called yesterday on Marie," Angelo said abruptly, with a slight suggestion of constraint in his voice. "It was — rather a surprise to me. I supposed she was in America."

"Diavolo! She is still here, then?"

"Still? Did you know she was on the Riviera?"

"I knew she came — weeks ago. She went up to Roquebrune to see the curé. She'd heard he was an old friend of ours — and she inquired for you — wouldn't say who she was. That was before I arrived."

"How do you know it was Idina, if she didn't give her name?"

"The curé's description. There was no mistaking it. He said at a little distance her eyes looked white, like a statue's."

"Ah — that was good! They are like that. Curious eyes. Curious woman. Why didn't you tell me before about her visit to the curé?"

"I meant to. But you put off coming so long. And I — well, I confess I forgot."

"You're excusable in the circumstances, my dear boy. After all, it's of no importance."

"No. And then, as I never saw her anywhere about, there was reason to suppose she'd left. If I thought of her at all, I thought she'd gone."

"It seems she's been staying for weeks at the Annonciata — I fancy she called it — a hotel on a little mountain close to Mentone. She says the air's very fine — and she's been ordered south by an American doctor. Had pneumonia in the autumn."

"What about the distant cousin over there who was going to leave her money?"

"He's dead, and she's got the money. She is wearing a kind of second mourning — gray and black. It made her look rather hard, I thought."

"She always did look hard, except ——"

"Except? What's the rest, Vanno?"

"I was going to say, 'Except for you.'"

"I — er — she seems to have got over that nonsense now. I must confess it gave me rather a start when I came in from a smoke in the garden yesterday, and found her sitting with Marie in the yellow salon. For a minute I was afraid — well, I hardly know of what."

"Dio! You didn't think she'd try to do Marie a mischief?"

"No. Hardly that. But it passed through my mind that she might try to make trouble between us. Not that she could."

"Did you — don't answer unless you care to— ever tell Marie about Idina?"

"Not till yesterday, after her call. It never occurred to me. Idina had gone out of my life

before Marie came into it, and she was never anything to me."

"I know. It was the other way round. But — you were good to her, and cousinly, and I suppose she misunderstood a little."

"I never realized that, until she was going to America, and she hinted — er — that she wouldn't care about getting the money if it weren't for — well, you know. Or you can guess."

"She thought father would approve of a marriage between you if she became an heiress."

"Partly that, and partly she seemed to believe that I'd have spoken to her of love if she hadn't been a kind of dependent on my father. I tried to make her understand without putting it into brutal words, that I did love her of course, but only as a cousin. It's the devil having to tell a woman you don't want her! I'm not sure she did entirely understand, for she wrote me a letter afterward — it followed me to Dresden, and came the day after Marie had promised to be my wife. I didn't answer. I thought when Idina heard of my marriage she'd see why I hadn't replied, and why it was kinder not to write. I knew she would hear through father, for she corresponds with him. He is very punctilious about answering letters; and suspecting nothing he would tell the news. When I found her with Marie yesterday — but I see now I was a fool. These melodramatic things don't happen. And after all, Idina's a cold woman."

"I wonder?"

"Well, anyhow, she was very civil to me and pleasant to Marie, whom I questioned afterward about what Idina had said before I came in. It seems there was nothing — but I explained to my wife that there'd been a boy and girl friendship between Idina and me, a sort of cousinly half flirtation, nothing more. And really there *was* nothing more."

"Certainly not," Vanno agreed, emphatically. "But it's just as well to tell Marie, so that in case Idina should do something — one of those things women call 'catty' — she'd be prepared."

"Yes, it is better to have no concealments," said Angelo. "Luckily I have no other complications in my past. Nothing to dread. And Marie is an angel. She would forgive me anything, I believe, if there were anything I had to ask her to forgive."

"As you would her," Vanno added, impulsively.

"With her, there could be nothing to forgive," Angelo replied, stiffening. "She is an angel. And now, enough of my affairs. Let us talk about yours."

XXVIII

When her husband and brother-in-law had left her, Princess Della Robbia began to go upstairs very slowly. She mounted with her hand on the balusters, as if she were weak or tired. At last, when she had reached the étage of the Winters' flat, she paused, and rested for several minutes before the door which displayed the chaplain's card. She was breathing rather fast, which was but natural perhaps, as she had ascended three flights of stairs, was wearing an immensely long and wide ermine stole, and carrying a huge muff to match. Before she touched the electric bell she pulled her large hat forward a little over her face, and adjusted the thick veil, which had a pattern like a spider's web. Then she opened a gold vanity box suspended from her wrist by a chain, and looked at herself in the small mirror it contained. Her face was so shadowed by the hat and disguised by the veil that at a little distance it might be difficult for any one not very familiar with her features and figure to recognize her at all.

When she had shut the vanity box with a sharp snap, she pressed the electric bell, and waited with her head bowed. She kept it bowed when the beautiful Storm-cloud opened the door, and still while she inquired in French for Miss Grant.

There was no one in the pretty American-looking drawing-room when Nathalie ushered her in. Throwing a quick glance around, the Princess chose a chair so placed that her back was turned not only to the window but to a table with an electric lamp on it, which would in all probability soon be lighted. Hardly was she seated, when the door was thrown open quickly, and Mary came in.

Princess Della Robbia rose, her left arm thrust into her big ermine muff, so that her right hand might be free if it must be given in greeting. But she did not step forward as if eager to greet Vanno's fiancée.

"Princess Della Robbia?" Mary said, rather shyly. "How good of you to come to see me."

She put out her hand and took that of the Princess. This brought them close together, and as they were of nearly the same height, they looked into each other's faces, though the Princess still kept her head slightly bent, her eyes and forehead in shadow.

"Marie Grant!"

Mary cried out the name sharply.

"Hush!" said the Princess, with a convulsive pressure on the other's hand. "For God's sake! Don't ruin me!"

Mary, with the last rays of afternoon light full on her face, turned pale to the lips, and the pupils of her eyes seemed to dilate.

"Oh, Marie, darling!" she faltered. "I wouldn't ruin you for the world — not to save my life. I — it was only that I was so surprised. I'm glad —

very glad to see you. I've dreamed of you a thousand times — and just before coming to Monte Carlo, too. I expected some one else when I came into this room, a Princess Della Robbia ——"

"I am Princess Della Robbia," Marie said in a veiled, dead voice.

"You — but I don't understand ——"

"I'll tell you. I want to tell you," the Princess broke in quickly, the words almost jumbled together in her haste. "We must talk before any one comes. Will any one come?"

"No, no," Marie soothed her. "Mrs. Winter is out. She won't be back till four. It's only a little after three."

The Princess thrust her arm through her muff so that she could take both Mary's hands. She pressed them tightly, her fingers jerking as if by mechanism. "I've come — I've got to throw myself on your mercy," she said.

"Don't," Mary implored, "use such words to me. Oh, Marie, how strange — how strange everything is! The night before I left the convent, Peter — dear Peter, who loves you too, always — said that perhaps my dreams meant that you thought of me sometimes — that we might meet. Then I didn't expect to come here. She told me not to come. But she said, 'Anything can happen at Monte Carlo.'"

"Anything can happen anywhere," the Princess answered in a muffled voice. "It is a terrible world. It's been a terrible world for me since I saw you.

And now — just when it's turned into heaven, you can send me down to hell."

"It kills me to hear you talk so," Mary said, tears rising in her eyes, and falling slowly. "*I!* Why, Marie dearest, didn't you just hear me say I'd rather die than hurt you? I don't know what you mean."

"Do you understand that I'm married to the brother of the man you're engaged to marry?"

"Why — yes. You told me that you — that you're the Princess Della Robbia."

"Well, my husband *doesn't know.* Nobody in my life now, knows anything about — the part that came before. Nobody must know. I'd kill myself rather than have Angelo find out, or even suspect. He thinks I ——" She stopped, and choked. "He thinks I am ——" The sob would come. She broke down, crying bitterly. "Oh, Mary, I love him so. I worship him. He thinks I'm everything sweet and good and innocent, that I'd give my soul to be, for his sake. And now you've come ——"

"You don't think I'll tell!"

"Not if you say you won't. But I didn't know. You were always so good. You might have thought it your duty. Mary — you won't tell Vanno? I couldn't bear it!"

"I won't tell Vanno, or any one at all."

"You're sure — *sure* you won't let anything drop, by mistake?"

"Explain to me exactly what you want me to do," Mary said, "and I'll do it. Are we to have been strangers to each other till to-day — is that it?"

"Yes, that's the best thing: less complicated. It will save telling lies."

"I should hate to tell lies," said Mary.

"You needn't. Oh, the hundreds and thousands I've had to tell! The dreary, uphill work! But now I'm on the hill, the beautiful hill in the sunshine where my husband lives. And I'm going to stay there if I have to wade in lies."

Mary shivered a little at the words and the look in Marie's eyes as they stared behind the spider web veil. But she tried not to show that she was shocked. She felt she would give her hand to be cut off rather than hurt this miserable girl who had sinned and suffered, and now stood desperately at bay.

"Try to be happy; try to trust me," she said. "We used to be such friends."

"That was my only hope when I found that Vanno was engaged to you, and that we should have to meet," Marie confessed. "I hated to come, but I had to brave it out. And I thought it just possible you mightn't recognize me, after all these years." She pushed up her veil nervously. "Haven't I changed? Do say I've changed!"

"Your hair looks lighter. There's more red in it, surely," Mary reflected aloud. "It used to be a dark brown. Now it's almost auburn."

"I bleach it. I began to do that when I first thought of trying to — get back to things. I wanted to make myself different, so that if any of the people who saw me when I — was down, came across me again, they mightn't be sure it was I —

they might think it was just a resemblance to — another woman. I took the name of Gaunt instead of Grant, because it was so nearly the same, it might seem to have been a very simple mistake, if any complication came. And I went to live far away from every one I'd ever known. I chose Dresden. I can hardly tell why, except that I'd never been there, and I wanted to paint. I stayed at first in a pension kept by an artist's wife. The artist helped me, and I did very well with my work. That's what saved me. If I hadn't had that talent, there would have been only one of two things for me to do: kill myself, or — worse."

"Let's not think of it, since it's all over," said Mary, gently. She took Marie by the hand again, and made her sit down on Rose Winter's chintz covered sofa. Then she sat beside her friend and almost timidly slid an arm round her waist.

"All over!" the Princess echoed, in a voice so weary and old, so unlike the bright sleigh-bell gayety Angelo knew, that he would hardly have recognized his wife. "That's the horrible part — that's the punishment: never to know whether it's 'all over,' or whether at any minute, just as one begins to dare feel a little happy and safe, one isn't going to be found out. For instance, when my husband wanted a villa at Cap Martin. Once, before I knew we would be coming here, I told him that I'd never been to the Riviera. It was necessary to tell him that. But, Mary, I had been. It makes me sick when I think what a short time ago it was.

I came to Monte Carlo with — *him*, and we stopped for weeks at a big hotel. Every day and all day we were in the Casino. Afterward we went to Russia, and it was in Russia he left me — in St. Petersburg. Often I go back there in dreams, and to Monte Carlo too. I suppose you *knew* about me, always — you and — Peter?"

"Neither of us knew much. But I know all I want to know — unless you feel there's anything it would do you good to tell."

"It does me a little good to be able to speak out to some one for the first time in years, now the worst is over, and I haven't to be afraid of you. If you could dream what I went through to-day! Mary, are you sure — sure of yourself — that you won't give me away?"

"Very, very sure," Mary answered steadily. "I think it would have been better if you'd told the Prince before you married him, and then you'd have nothing to fear now, but ——"

"He wouldn't have married me. One of my great attractions in his eyes was — what I have not. You don't know that family yet, Mary. I think the brothers are a good deal alike in some ways, though Angelo is more of a saint than Vanno. They adore purity in women. I think they both have a sort of pitying horror for women who aren't — innocent."

Mary was silent. She had reason to believe that the Princess was right.

"And I couldn't give him up," Marie went on. "It was too much even for God to expect. It was

such a beautiful romance — the first true romance in my life. It seemed to be recreating me. I almost felt as if his love would *make* me worthy if I could only take and keep it. It was a dreadful risk, but — I dared it, and I'd do it again, if I had it to do, even if I paid by losing my soul. I used to think at first that perhaps when we'd been married a long time, and I was sure of his love, I might tell him — a little, not everything. But now I know that I never, never can. It would be a thousand times worse than before, if he found out. It would mean my death, that's all. I couldn't look into his eyes, his dear, beautiful eyes that adore me, that I adore. You haven't seen him yet. But you know Vanno's eyes, and what it would be to see them turn cold after they have been — stars of love. That expresses them."

"Yes, that expresses them," Mary almost whispered. She closed her eyelids for an instant and Vanno's eyes looked into hers, as they had looked in the curé's garden, after the first kiss. Nothing that Marie could have said would have made her understand as clearly. If she were as Marie was, she felt that she could not tell Vanno, now that his eyes had worshipped her. She would not marry him and *not* tell, if there were things that ought to be told; but she would go away, far away, where the dear eyes might never look at her again.

"You don't know yet what it is to love," Marie went on; and Mary answered, as if she were speaking to herself, "I almost think I do know — now."

"If you do, you can understand me."

"I am beginning to understand," Mary said.

"You swear that you've said nothing to Vanno, to make him suspect? When he told you about his brother and sister-in-law, did he mention my name as — as a girl?"

"He said your name was Marie Gaunt ——"

"Oh! And then?"

"I believe I talked about having a friend once with a name rather like yours, but not quite. That's all, truly. I had no idea that Marie Gaunt ——"

"Did you speak about the convent?"

"I told him and the curé that I'd been brought up at a convent school, but I didn't say where it was, or anything about it at all. There was no time or chance then. I meant to tell Vanno lots of things when we were alone; but there was only our walk down the mountain together, and we had so much to say to each other about the present and future, I forgot about the past, and I think he did, too. The only thing I've had time to say about myself is that I've no relatives except a very disagreeable aunt and cousin. There was nothing, not a word, that you need be afraid of."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Marie, with a sigh as of one who wakes to consciousness free of pain, after an operation which might have opened the door of death. "And you'll swear to me that never will you tell Angelo, or Vanno, or any one else at all, that you'll not even confess to a priest that I was

Marie Grant, a girl you knew at the convent of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake."

"I'll swear it, if that will make you happier."

"It will — it does. Swear that nothing can tempt you to break your word."

"Nothing shall tempt me to break my word."

"Swear by your love for Vanno, and his for you."

"I swear by my love for Vanno and his love for me."

Marie bent down suddenly, seized Mary's hand, and kissed it.

"Thank you," she said. "Now I can be at peace, for a little while. Now I can be glad that you're engaged to Vanno. And we may see each other, and all four be happy together. The ordeal's over."

XXIX

In a few days most of the people between Nice and Mentone who had been interested in the beautiful and rather mysterious Mary Grant knew that she was engaged to marry Prince Giovanni Della Robbia, a son of the Roman Duke di Rienzi.

Many of them, especially the women, said that she was very lucky, probably a great deal luckier than she deserved; and all the gossip about her which had been a favourite tea-time topic, before her losses at the Casino began to make her a bore, was revived again. The self-satisfied mother and bird-like girl who had travelled with her in the Paris train had a great deal to say. They wondered "if the poor Prince *knew;* but of course he couldn't know. He was simply infatuated. Very sad. He was such a handsome young man, so noble looking, and so, in a way, *historic.* A million times too good for Miss Grant, even if there were nothing against her. Of course, he had gambled too: but then everything was so different for a man.

They talked so much that the mother's bridge friends, and the girl's tennis friends, and the dwellers in villas who, for one cause or another, had admitted Mrs. and Miss Cayley Binns to the great honour of "luncheon-terms" or the

lesser honour of "tea-terms," asked them for particulars. Facts were demanded at a luncheon given for the purpose by Lady Meason, whose husband had once been Lord Mayor of London. This lady had gone to bed and stopped there for a month at the end of Sir Henry's year of office, in sheer chagrin that "Othello's occupation" was gone, and her crown of glory set upon another's head, while she must retire to the obscurity of Bayswater. Being threatened with acute melancholia, a specialist had advised a change of air; and Lady Meason had begun once more to blossom like a rose — of the fully developed, cabbage order — in the joy of being "one of the most notable, popular and successful hostesses of the season at Mentone." She had bought several hundred copies of a Riviera paper which described her in this manner, and sent them to all the people who had cooled to her at the end of Sir Henry's Great Year; and living on her new reputation, she gave each week at her handsome villa two large luncheons, one small and select dinner where no untitled person was invited, and a huge Saturday afternoon tea at the Mentone Casino, with a variety entertainment thrown in. She had rented a villa last occupied by a notorious semi-royal personage, and engaged at great expense one of the best *chefs* to be had on the Riviera; had indeed, figuratively speaking, snapped him out of the mouth of a duke; and somehow, no one quite knew how, had succeeded, after nerve-racking efforts, in capturing

a few of the bright, particular stars whose light really counted in the social illumination of the Riviera. To get them in the first instance, she had been obliged to give a dance, and to offer cotillon favours worth at least five hundred francs each; and these things had been alluringly displayed in a fashionable jeweller's window for a week before the entertainment, just at the time when people were making up their minds whether or not to accept "that weird creature's" invitations. Afterward she had clinched matters by importing *en masse* a world-famed troop of dancers from the theatre at Monte Carlo to her villa at Mentone, paying them a thousand pounds for the evening; but her reward had been adequate. She was becoming a sort of habit — like a comfortable old coat — among the great, who like comfortable old coats as well as do those who are not great, and quite important persons were already forgetting to allude to her as a weird creature in confessing that they had accepted her invitations. She had even become of consequence enough to snub Lady Dauntrey at the opera in Monte Carlo, although, early in the season, the Dauntreys had been the first members of the peerage who had adorned her villa. As for Mrs. Holbein, of whose acquaintance she had almost boasted in prehistoric days when Sir Henry was only an alderman, Lady Meason now loudly refused to know her.

At first, Mrs. Cayley-Binns and her daughter (spelt Alys) had looked from afar off at the magnificent villa of this notable hostess, and had read

enviously the paragraphs in London and Riviera papers describing her entertainments, not missing one of the long list of names attached. Then one day they had come across the name of Miss Constantia Sutfield, a woman who had been governess to a royal princess. Morton Cayley, M.D., their distant cousin, had cured Miss Sutfield of a malady pronounced fatal by other physicians with fewer letters after their names. He was unfortunately a very distant cousin; but when he was young Mrs. Cayley-Binns' late husband had lent him money, and he had been so grateful that she had always felt entitled to speak of him openly as "dear cousin Morton, the great physician, you know, whom all the royalties love." She wrote promptly and begged him for a letter of introduction to Miss Sutfield, who was living above the lower levels of Mentone, at the Annonciata. The letter came and was sent to Miss Sutfield, after Mrs. Cayley-Binns had increased her expenses at the Hotel Victoria Palace, by taking better rooms and a private salon. She had heard it said that the lady inquired of hall porters, before presenting her visiting cards, on which floor were the apartments of her would-be acquaintances, and whether they had their own sitting-room. Miss Sutfield, who always talked of the princess (now a queen) whom she had governed as "dear little Mousie," called in her most stately manner upon Sir Morton's cousins. She was chilling at first, icily regular as "Maud" herself, using the full power of that invaluable manner which had kept Mousie hypnotized for

years, both as princess and queen. The cold museum of her memory, full of stately echoings from palaces of kings, was opened for the Cayley-Binns' benefit as show-houses are thrown open to the humble public. She wore a majesty of air which, to the Cayley-Binns and others who had never "been to court" or to country house parties except in the pages of Society novels, seemed peculiarly distinctive of the peerage. She warmed slightly, however, when in some turn of the conversation Mrs. Cayley-Binns mentioned knowing "that Miss Grant, who is engaged to *poor* Prince Giovanni Della Robbia." Seeing that she had inadvertently struck a vein of ore, Mrs. Cayley-Binns ventured to hint that the family of the Prince was known to her also. She was wisely a little mysterious about the acquaintance, and contrived to pique the interest of Miss Sutfield by vague and desperately involved allusions. When she begged the lady's good offices in the matter of a card for Lady Meason's next Casino tea, the favour was promised. The card came for mother and daughter, who met nobody during the early part of the entertainment, except a journalist who kindly pointed out notabilities — a good-natured man who confessed hating so intensely to hurt people's feelings that he invented for his "society" articles new pink, white or green frocks for girls who were too often obliged to appear in their old blue ones, during the season. Later, however, Miss Sutfield swept toward them like a large yacht under full sail, and regretted that her friend Miss Idina Bland had been prevented

from appearing, on account of a sharp attack of influenza.

"She's staying with me at the Annonciata," Mousie's friend explained; "a charming creature, so uncommon, lately come into a tremendous lot of money, I believe, through some relative in America she nursed till the end. She wanted to have a talk with you both, when I told her you knew the Duke of Rienzi's family. They're cousins of hers in some way. She seems keen to hear about this Miss Grant. But everybody wants to hear about her! Would you like to come to quite a small intimate sort of lunch party at Lady Meason's, and meet Miss Bland when she gets well, and let us have a nice little cozy gossip about this *quaint* engagement?"

Mrs. Cayley-Binns was enchanted. The one difficulty lay in the scantiness of her information. She made up her mind, however, like a good general, that the difficulty must somehow be overcome, and accepted without visible hesitation. Before she left the Casino she invited the journalist to call, with the intention of pumping him, as he seemed to know everything about everybody of importance, and might have details to impart concerning Prince Vanno Della Robbia. Also, on the way home she bought an 'Almanach de Gotha," and made herself familiar with the family history of the Dukes of Rienzi, since the year 1215, when the title first came into being.

Naturally, when the moment arrived, and everybody at Lady Meason's table was looking eagerly

at Mrs. Cayley-Binns — hitherto insignificant — she felt forced to say something worth saying about Miss Grant. She swallowed hard, choked in a crumb, hastily sipped the excellent champagne Lady Meason gave at her second-best parties, and recovering herself said that "well, really, what she knew was almost too shocking to tell." There was a Frenchman, good-looking, evidently a sort of gentleman, in the train with Miss Grant when she was travelling from England. They had pretended to be strangers, but had evidently known each other well, as several little signs crossing on the boat, and later, had "given away." Since then, this man had followed Miss Grant to Monte Carlo, and the Cayley-Binns had seen him talking to her *most earnestly* in a retired corner of the biggest room at the Casino. Not (Mrs. Cayley-Binns hastened to interpolate) that she was in the habit of taking her daughter to the Casino at Monte Carlo, or of going often herself, but occasionally if with friends she did "just walk through the Rooms, on a Concert day." Others, whose word *could not be doubted*, had said that the Frenchman, an artist, had got into difficulties at the Casino and had obtained money from Miss Grant, some of it in the form of cheques, which he had boasted of and shown everywhere. Of course he must be a detestable creature; but that fact did not excuse Miss Grant's friendship with him; rather the contrary. And even if he were a blackmailer, why, there must be *some* foundation for the blackmail; otherwise there would be no object in paying

to have a secret kept — whatever it might be. Then there ensued a good deal of discussion as to the nature of the secret, provided it existed; and Mrs. Cayley-Binns talked eloquently though discreetly with Miss Bland about the latter's "interesting Roman relatives." She admitted to Prince Vanno's cousin that she had not "exactly been at Rome. or at Monte Della Robbia, though she had travelled in Italy"; but she "thought it must have been in Cairo" that she had met the Prince. He was so much in the East, was he not? And she too had been in the East. (It was not necessary to state that it had been in an excursion steamer which allowed three days for Cairo, three for Constantinople.) The dear Prince might possibly not remember her name, but she would never forget him, he was so handsome and agreeable, such a romantic figure in the world; and Alys was quite in love with his profile.

In the end, she discovered that Miss Bland was far more interested in the elder brother than the younger, and in Prince Della Robbia's wife rather than in Prince Vanno's fiancée; but it was too late to construct an acquaintance, however slight, with the former; and certainly Miss Bland had seemed interested in the details concerning Mary Grant. The girl's name had struck her particularly, it appeared. She repeated it several times over, saying, "Mary Grant — Mary Grant. I didn't know her name was Mary." And Miss Bland had the air of being puzzled, as if there was something in the name—a very common sort of name — which perplexed her.

Luckily Mrs. Cayley-Binns and Alys were sure that the name was Mary. They had seen it on a cheque, payable at a Monte Carlo bank, which Miss Grant by request had given to a bazaar for a Mentone charity. Of course people like that often were charitable; and in such persons it was more selfish than generous when you came to think of it, as charity was supposed to cover a multitude of sins.

Everywhere the engagement was talked of, for it was considered extraordinary and hardly allowable that an eccentric, sensational sort of girl about whose early career nobody knew anything should have "gobbled up" a young man whose name was known throughout Europe. There were only a few who went about saying that she was worthy of her Prince; Dick Carleton, who was loyal, though heartbroken; Jim Schuyler, who wondered always why Mary Grant's face was closely associated in his mind with his cousin Molly Maxwell's; Major Norwood, who rejoiced that Mary was appropriated, because the Maharajah of Indorwana would now see the uselessness of lingering at Monte Carlo; and Captain Hannaford, who said rather loudly wherever he went that the Roman chap was a d — d lucky fellow.

The Dauntreys said nothing at all on the subject. If they had opinions they had ceased to count, for more people every day were dropping even Lord Dauntrey. There had been a scene at a hotel, where Lady Dauntrey had struck Miss Collis in the face with her muff, for refusing to bow to her. A pink paper in London had printed a verse describ-

ing the scene, which everybody saw and talked about and laughed at. The paying guests all, or almost all, left the Villa Bella Vista after this, and — it was said — tradesmen were refusing supplies. The servants were gone or going; Lady Dauntrey had to do her own work or leave it undone; but still Lord Dauntrey was continually in the Casino, his wife hovering restlessly in the background. Even the Holbeins gave them up, and Lady Dauntrey was sometimes seen with the Frenchman who boasted of receiving Miss Grant's cheques. He was supposed to be introducing amateurs to Lord Dauntrey, as fresh "victims" for the system.

As for Mary, she was out of the exotic atmosphere of gossip and scandal and system-mongering. It would have surprised her extremely if she had been told that whole luncheon parties at villas, and tea-parties at second-rate hotels, thrived and battened on talk concerning her affairs, past, present, and to come. She was so happy that she felt often as if she loved everybody in the world, and longed to make everybody else as happy, or almost as happy, as she.

For two days after meeting the Princess Della Robbia she was thoughtful, and a little absent-minded even with Vanno; but when his brother and sister-in-law came together to call upon her, Marie appeared so light-hearted, so entirely at ease, that Mary began to regain her spirits again. It was foolish to feel sad and anxious, almost conscience-stricken, about Marie, if Marie had none of these feelings about herself.

Then Mrs. Winter gave a large "At Home" in Miss Grant's honour, which was a great success. Marie did not come, because she was unfortunately suffering with headache; but Prince Della Robbia appeared, and stood most of the time near Mary and Vanno.

It was wonderful how many people knew and liked the Winters. All the most interesting "personages" on the Riviera passed through Rose's pretty rooms that afternoon, if but to say "How do you do?" and "Goodbye," and make the acquaintance of Prince Vanno, with the Princess-to-be. Everybody came, from a dowdy and perfectly charming German royalty down to poor old General Caradine, who had played roulette for twenty-five years, with the same live Mexican toad for a fetish; whose two great boasts were that he had learned the language of birds, and that he had fought a duel with a man for defaming Queen Mary of Scots. There were an English Foreign Secretary and a leader of the Opposition hobnobbing together. There was an author who wrote under two names, and had come to study Monte Carlo in order to write two epoch-making novels, one in favour of the Casino, one against, and was taking notes of everybody he met, for both books. There was an Austrian princess who had more beautiful jewels than any woman at Monte Carlo, except a celebrated dancer who was taking a rest cure at the Hôtel de Paris; and there was the princess' half-sister who had married a poor artist and lived in his house in the mountains,

doing her own cooking. Also there were all Rose's queer black sheep who yielded meekly to her ribbon-wreathed crook, though they "butted" against George's methods. Some of these were seriously shorn sheep, yet Rose would not for worlds have hurt their feelings by forgetting to invite them.

It was a marvellously incongruous assemblage, as most large and far-reaching entertainments at Monte Carlo must be; and odd things happened in corners behind tea-tables, such as young gamblers producing large wads of notes freshly won in the Rooms and flourishing them under the eyes of ladies who tabooed the name of the Casino. But there was no gossip, no scandal: for somehow in "St. George" Winter's house one felt warmly disposed even to one's enemies; and no unkind words were spoken by any one except General Caradine. He, who had a habit of mumbling his secret thoughts aloud unconsciously, was heard to mutter: "Same old crew: same dull lot, year after year, world without end. Damned tired of 'em!"

This party cleared the air for Mary. Engaged to Prince Vanno Della Robbia, approved by his elder brother, and the guest of the popular Winters, those who counted in the great world were quite ready to forget that she had been "rather talked about," or else to like her all the better for that reason. It was only the people who were on the fringe of things, like Mrs. Cayley-Binns, or beyond the pale, like Mrs. Holbein or Lady Dauntrey, who bitterly remembered her eccentricities.

The day after Rose's "At Home" for Miss Grant was Mary's last as the Winters' guest. Princess Della Robbia wanted her at the Villa Mirasole, and Vanno wished her to go. He had written to tell the Duke of his engagement; and as his father begged him to come home and talk it over, he thought of leaving soon, for three or four days. He felt that, if he must part from Mary, he would like her to be at his brother's house.

While Rose's maid oblingingly packed her things, Mary went out on that last afternoon for a walk with Vanno. He had a special object in view, it seemed, but intended it to be a surprise.

First, he took her to the rock of the tablet, "Remember eternal at my heart." It was early, and fashionable folk were still lingering over their luncheons at the restaurants, therefore the two had the long road, in curve after curve of dusty whiteness, all to themselves, as if hour and place were both their own.

"It was here we first spoke to each other," Vanno said, "here where another man of Italy who loved a girl of your country had the great moment of his life to remember. Something made me speak to you at this spot. Perhaps where love has been — everlasting love — it leaves an influence always, something stronger and more eternal and far more subtle than words carved in a tablet of marble or stone. Who can tell about such things in life, things that are in life yet beyond and behind it, where we can catch only whispers of a message and a mystery?

Perhaps it was the influence of that other love which made me speak in spite of myself—for I hadn't meant to speak. I wanted to tell you here, dearest one, *cara, carissima,* how I love you — how my love for you is 'eternal at my heart' and my soul — all there is of me."

He took both her hands, and when his eyes had said again to her eyes what his lips had just spoken, they both looked up at the words on the marble tablet.

"If those two who loved each other return in spirit sometimes together," Vanno said, "I think they must have been here the day when we first met at this spot, and that they are here again now. If they see us they know why we have come, and they are glad and pleased with us, like two lovers who 'make a match' between dear friends."

"It is a beautiful thought of yours," Mary answered; "and it seems so real that I can almost see those lovers. But remember the story — how they were parted forever on this earth. Do you know, I feel almost — just a tiny bit — superstitious. I mean about our coming here especially to make a vow of eternal love to each other. What if we, too, should be parted?"

"Darling, nothing can part us," Vanno assured her, "because love has made our hearts one, now and forever. You and I have belonged to each other since time began, through hundreds of earth-lives perhaps, and thousands of vicissitudes: always finding one another again. A little while ago, a cloud

came between us, and it seemed as if we might be swept away from one another; but it passed, and we found each other and ourselves, in the light, far above cloudline. That's why I say, nothing can part us now, not even death. And as for this tablet of two parted lovers, it wasn't put up to commemorate their sorrows, but their happiness; and so it can bring us only happiness."

"Look!" Mary exclaimed, standing back a little from the mule path which descended there, and pressing closer under the rock of the tablet. Winding down the path came a little procession, a few peasants bareheaded, dressed in black, clean and piteous in their neatness. The women were silently crying, tears wet on their brown cheeks, their eyes red. The men, two who were old and two who were young, carried a very small, roughly made bier, on which was a tiny coffin almost covered with flowers, and wild, scented herbs of the mountains. Their thick boots clattered on the cobblestones, but they made no other sound, and none raised their eyes as they went by. It was as if the lovers were invisible to them, as though they were of a different order of being which the sad eyes were not fitted to see.

As the procession defiled upon the main road, at the foot of the mule path it paused a moment. Though the mourners did not see him, Vanno took off his hat and stood with it held rather high above his head, in his right hand, as is the custom with all Latin men for the passing of a funeral. The driver of a landau that climbed the hill, and a chauffeur

driving an automobile down toward the lower Corniche, paid the same reverence to the little coffin, giving right of way to the procession before moving on. The funeral turned in the direction of Roquebrune, and Mary and Vanno guessed that it was going to the church there, and the curé. But in the landau which had waited was a pretty young bride and a tall-hatted bridegroom, with bridesmaid and "best man." They were evidently beginning the honeymoon, which would consist of a long drive in wedding finery and flowers, then a dinner, and perhaps the grand *finale* of a dance. At sight of the funeral coming out from the mule path and passing directly in front of their horses, the bride let fall her huge bouquet, and regardless of tulle veil and fluffy laces, cast herself into her husband's arms, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"*Quel mauvais signe!*" muttered the driver, as he put on his much paraffined silk hat, settled his wedding *boutonnière* in its place, and drove on at a trot.

Mary looked up at Vanno without speaking, but her eyes, saddened by the sorrow of others, asked a question.

"'In the midst of life!'" Vanno quoted. "But it is not a bad sign for us or for any one. And even if we were superstitious, we saw the wedding *last*."

XXX

Vanno's "surprise" for Mary was a beautiful piece of land which he wanted to buy for her, in order to have a home where they might come sometimes, and spend a few weeks alone together in the country where they had first met and loved each other.

The ground that he had set his heart upon was close to the curé's garden, and it belonged to Achille Gonzales. Already, at Vanno's request, the curé had interviewed both Achille and the older Gonzales. An appointment had been made for three o'clock, and the curé was to have introduced the two rich peasants, father and son, to the Prince; but owing to the procession which Vanno and Mary had seen, he was not able to keep his engagement. And rather strangely, Mary's host had been prevented by much the same reason, from accepting Vanno's invitation to meet him "on the land" a little later. He too had a funeral service that day, but a very different funeral, and one which oppressed "St. George" Winter with a peculiar sadness. Death, as a rule, did not seem sad to him; but he had a horror of the habit of gambling, which appeared to his eyes like an incubus on a man's life, a dead albatross hung round the neck to rot. And

this man who had died and was to be buried in the cemetery at Monaco had been a gambler for thirty years. He and his faded wife had existed rather than lived in a third-class hotel, where they kept on the same rooms year after year, never going away in the summer unless, if exceptionally prosperous, to spend a few of the hottest weeks in the mountains. Their tiny rooms were given them at a cheap rate because the man brought clients to the hotel, "amateurs" who wished to learn his great system, the system to whose perfecting he had devoted thirty years. He had advertised himself, and almost believed in himself, as "*le roi de la roulette*," who for payment of two louis would impart to any one the secret of unlimited wealth. Ignoring failure, pursuing success, his own tiny fortune, his wife's youth, had gone. And as his body went to the grave the whole record of his life — thousands of roulette cards in neat packets, innumerable note-books containing the great secret — lay waiting for the dustman. The man's wife in preparing to leave Monte Carlo forever had turned all his treasures out of the trunks where through years they had accumulated, and had them flung into a huge dust bin kept for the waste things of the hotel kitchen. This George Winter knew, for the woman had boasted bitterly of the last revenge she meant to take. "'Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.' Let all be swept away and forgotten," she had said; and the words haunted the chaplain, mourning through his brain like the voice of the

tideless sea that moaned ceaselessly under his study window.

He longed to go back to Rose and be cheered by her into hopefulness, to have her assure him in her warm, loving way that he was doing some good in this strange place of brilliant gayety and black tragedy; that his work was not all in vain, though so often he likened it to the task of Sisyphus. But he found Dick Carleton with Rose, and their faces told him that there was no hope of comfort.

"Oh, St. George, poor Captain Hannaford is dead!" were Rose's first words as her husband came into the drawing-room. Then she was sorry that she had flung the news at him so abruptly, for just too late she read in his eyes the wistful need of consolation.

"Dead!" he echoed, almost stupidly. He had liked Hannaford, and had often invited him to play chess in the evenings, hoping with unconquerable optimism to "wean him from the Casino." The quiet man, with his black patches, his calm manner and slow smile as unreadable as the eyes of the Sphinx, had seemed to George Winter a curiously tragic yet mysteriously attractive figure. "Hannaford dead!" he repeated slowly.

"I only just heard," Dick explained. "I was down at my hangar tinkering with the *Flying Fish*, for, you know, I'm taking her to Cannes to-morrow. Poor Hannaford's hotel isn't far away, and he used to stroll over and talk to me sometimes. The manager knew that, and sent a boy to ask me to

come in at once. He didn't say what the matter was, except that something had happened to Hannaford. It seems that lately he's been in the habit of sleeping through the whole morning, giving orders that he wasn't to be disturbed till he rang. So when there were no signs of him to-day at lunch time nobody worried. It was only when two o'clock came and he hadn't stirred that the *valet de chambre* began to think it queer. They have glass transoms over the doors, and they could see his room was dark. I expect they listened at the keyhole; anyhow, the landlord was consulted at last, and when they'd knocked and called without getting any answer, at last they opened the door. Luckily nobody was about at that time of day — every one out of doors or in the Casino, so there was no scene. Hannaford was lying as if asleep in bed, but stone cold; and the doctor they sent for said he must have been dead for hours. In his hand was a volume of Omar Khayyam, with a faded white rose for a book marker. There was a bottle half full of veronal tabloids on the table by the bedside; and he was known to be in the habit of taking veronal, as he was a bad sleeper. One hopes it was simply — an overdose, taken accidentally."

"Why should any one suspect the contrary?" Winter asked, his kind voice sharpened by distress.

Dick was silent, looking at Rose.

"Come and sit by me, dear," she said, holding out her hand to her husband. He came, sinking down on the sofa with a sense of relief, for he had

been conscious of a weakness in the knees, as if on entering the room he had stumbled blindly against a bar of iron.

"Dick and I had just got to that part, when you opened the door," Rose went on. "We are afraid — you said yourself that Captain Hannaford was changed, the last time he came here."

"Only three days ago," George mused aloud. "He didn't look well. But he said he was all right."

"He would! You know how he hated to talk of himself or anything he felt, poor fellow. But I thought even then — I guessed —— "

"What?"

"That it was a blow to him, hearing of Mary Grant's engagement." As she said this, Rose carefully did not look at her cousin. She was not at all anxious about Dick. She knew that he would "get over it," and even prophesied to herself that his heart would be "caught in the rebound" by the first very pretty, very nice girl who happened to be thrown with him in circumstances at all romantic. Mary was not his first love by any means, and would certainly not be his last; and meanwhile Rose felt that unconsciously he was enjoying his own jealous pain. Still, she did not wish to "rub it in." "We both imagined that Captain Hannaford was in love with Miss Grant," she explained; for one had to explain these things to George. She often thought it a wonder that he had come down to earth long enough to fall in love, himself; but when she ob-

served this to him, he had answered that it was not coming down to earth.

"We were most of us more or less in that condition," Dick remarked bravely.

"The rest of you have a great deal left to live for, even without her," said Rose. "Captain Hannaford hadn't. But I'm thankful they're not likely, anyhow, to prove that his death was not — an accident."

"They don't go out of their way to prove such things here, ever," Dick mumbled.

"People will say," Rose pursued, "that there was no motive for suicide — nothing to worry about. He'd won heaps of money, and seemed very keen on the villa he'd bought."

"By Jove, I wonder what'll happen to that unlucky villa now!" Carleton exclaimed. "Somehow, Hannaford didn't seem the sort of chap to bother about wills and leaving all his affairs nice and tidy in case anything happened."

"He told me once that he had no people — that he was entirely alone," said George. "Still, he must have had friends, friends far more intimate than those he made here. Even we were no more than acquaintances. He gave us no confidence."

"I can't imagine his confiding in any one," Rose said. "But — I'm not at all sure whether it's a coincidence or not: a letter has just come by the afternoon post, for Mary Grant, in his handwriting. It has an Italian stamp, and is post-marked Ventimiglia. Probably he wrote it yesterday, at the

Château Lontana, knowing it wouldn't get to her till this afternoon, as the posts from Italy are so slow."

"How strange!" George exclaimed. "Strange, and very sad."

"The letter hadn't been in the house five minutes, when Dick came in with the news of his death."

George's eyes, which appeared always to see something mysteriously beautiful behind people's heads, fixed themselves on vacancy that did not seem to be vacant for him. "Hannaford was there in his house alone yesterday, writing to Miss Grant," he murmured. "How little he thought that when she read his letter he would be in another world."

"I wonder?" Rose whispered. "It is long after five. Mary will be coming in soon. Then, perhaps, we shall know."

XXXI

Dick Carleton had gone before Vanno brought Mary back to the Winters' flat. Unconsciously he was enjoying his heartbreak. It was satisfactory to prove the depth and acuteness of his own feelings, for sometimes he had feared that he might not be capable of a great love, a love in the "grand manner," such as swept off their feet men in the novels and plays which women adored. Now he believed himself to be in the throes of such a love and was secretly proud of his passion, but the pain of seeing Prince Vanno with Mary was rather too real, too sharp for analytical enjoyment; and when he could, Dick avoided twisting the knife in his wound.

Rose and George Winter had been alone together only for a few minutes, and there had been no time to decide upon any plan of action, when Mary and Vanno came in.

The girl was looking radiant, for in the excitement of bargaining for land she had forgotten, not the little procession to which men lifted their hats, but the heavy sense of impending loss it had laid upon her heart. Rose thought that she had never seen Mary in such beauty. She seemed to exhale happiness; and the fancy flashed through the mind of the older woman that the girl's body was like a trans-

parent vase filled to its crystal brim with the wine of joy and life. To tell the news of Hannaford's death would be to pour into the vase a dark liquid, and cloud the opalescent wine. Still, Mary must be told, and it would be better, safer, for her to know before she opened the letter with the Italian postmark; otherwise something written there might come upon her with a shock. Rose and her husband glanced at one another. Each was hoping that the other would find a way to begin.

Mary had come to feel very happily at home with the Winters in the short time she had spent with them; and often at night when she dreamed of being at the Villa Bella Vista she waked thankfully, with a sense of escape from something unknown yet vaguely terrible. She could talk with Rose and George Winter as with old friends, and Vanno too had the feeling of having known them both for a long time.

They began to tell of their adventures with the Gonzales family at Roquebrune, and Rose caught at the excuse to put off the moment she dreaded.

"It was such fun up there!" Mary exclaimed. "I'd no idea that one bought land by the square yard, or metre; but it's the way here, apparently; and Vanno's going to give that handsome young man who's engaged to your maid twelve francs a metre for his *terrain*, although there's no road to it. But really that's a great advantage according to the father, a large yellow old man with no hair to speak of, and only one tooth, round which his words seem

to eddy as water eddies round a stone in a pool. It was fascinating to watch! We're to have crowds of fireflies, because there'll be no motor dust; and the saying among the peasants is that the *mouches brillantes* search always with their lanterns, for a lost brother. And birds will '*se coucher dans les roses che nous.*' Isn't that a darling expression? Think of having birds go to bed in your roses! So you see, the land's quite worth the twelve francs, because there's no road; and I almost hope there'll never be one, for Vanno and I shan't want to come down often from our castle in the air, where the view's so wonderful. There's no water there yet; but the most fun of all to-day was the water-diviner the old Gonzales brought. He squatted on the ground, holding an immense silver watch by a chain — a little gnome of a man with a huge head thatched with gray hair. As he swung his watch, tendons in his throat worked as chicken's claws do scratching for worms; and whenever his watch began to swing violently it meant that he was over a spring. He found three springs within a few yards of each other, so we've only to dig, and get torrents of water."

"I'm sure you were children in the hands of those shrewd peasants," said Rose, "unless your friend the curé was with you."

"No, he wasn't, but he sent a man to translate the *patois*, for the old Gonzales can't speak much French; and it was lucky we had this man to take our part, because of a big caroubier-tree on the place which belongs to a distant cousin of the Gonzales,

and has been in his family for generations. Vanno must buy it separately, otherwise the owner will have a right to come and beat it all night if he likes, or tether animals under the branches. Fortunately the curé's friend warned us in time."

"Gonzales is rather a celebrated old chap," George Winter remarked, composing his mind as Mary talked on. "He made a reputation by refusing a fortune in order to keep a tiny *baraque* of a house which he and his wife had lived in for forty years."

"So he told us," said Vanno. "A wonderful story; it sounded too good to be true."

"Was it about the Russian countess who wanted to buy a large piece of land, and all the other peasant owners were keen to sell, except Gonzales, who had a bit about twenty yards square, exactly in the middle?" asked Rose.

"Yes, and the countess went up and up in her bidding from two thousand francs to four hundred thousand; but Gonzales wouldn't sell, because he liked the view. He told us that he still lives in the *baraque*, though he owns other houses and much land."

"Perfectly true," said Rose. "I walk up and chat with him sometimes. He's very rich for a peasant, and shrewd, though stupid too, for he has a horror of banks and hides his money heaven knows where. He had thousands of francs in banknotes in a cellar among his potatoes, and they were all eaten by rats; but he only shrugged his shoulders and said 'twas no worse than having them devoured

by speculators. Oh, these peasants of the Riviera are wonderful!"

"Vanno and I will make friends with them when we have a house up there," said Mary. "Maybe it will be ready next year. Who knows? Vanno says we must come every season, if only for a few weeks, just to show ourselves that we care for other things than the Casino. And then, how delightful to see our friends! You, who have been so good to me, and Captain Hannaford, if he's living in his Italian château ——"

"Dear, he won't be there," said Rose, laying her hand on Mary's, as the two sat together on the flowery chintz sofa.

"Why — what makes you think that?" Mary asked quickly, noticing at last the pallor of Rose's face.

"I don't think. I know. George and I have been wondering how we were to tell you, because you and Captain Hannaford were such good friends."

"Were? Oh, Mrs. Winter, he is not — dead? But no, we met him walking day before yesterday. He looked — much as usual. Only perhaps a little pale."

"His heart must have been weak," Rose said. "You know, he didn't sleep well. And a little while ago they found that he'd passed away in the night quite peacefully. They believe it must have been an overdose of veronal. He was in the habit of taking it."

Mary sprang up, her hands clasped and pressed

against her breast. All colour was drained from her face. There was a look of horror in her eyes, as if she saw some dreadful thing which others could not see. But Rose thought that she knew what brought the look, and hurried on before Mary could speak. "Such accidents have been happening often lately. People oughtn't to be allowed to buy drugs and take any dose they choose."

"It — they do say that — that it was an accident?" Mary stammered, the blood flowing slowly back to cheeks and lips.

"Oh, yes. Dick, who told us, said so at once. And everybody else here will say it, you may be sure."

Vanno went to Mary, and taking her clasped hands, with gentle force drew her against his shoulder, in true Latin indifference to the presence of others. "Darling, don't look so desperate," he said. "Poor Hannaford wasn't a happy man in his life. I think he must be glad to die."

"Ah, that is the reason I ——" Mary stopped. She had not told him or any one that Hannaford had wished to be more than a friend to her. It had not seemed right to tell even Vanno about another's love and disappointment. Almost it would have been, she felt, like boasting.

"Perhaps George and I might have let you go on being happy while you were with us," Rose said, "if a letter hadn't come addressed to you in Captain Hannaford's handwriting. It was better for you to know everything before opening it, just in case ——"

Rose did not finish her sentence, but, getting up, went to the mantelpiece, where she had placed the envelope in front of a gilded French clock that looked pitifully frivolous as a background.

"Would you like us to go out, and let you read your letter alone with the Prince?" she asked, as she gave the envelope to Mary.

The girl shook her head. "No, I'd rather have you all with me."

For a minute she stood with the sealed envelope in her hand, looking down at her name in Hannaford's clearly formed, thick, and very black handwriting. She had received two or three notes from him, and in spite of their friendship had tossed them indifferently away as soon as read. But that was before their luncheon together at the Rochers Rouges. Since then he had not written. Mary wished now that she had kept his letters, and her heart was heavy with remorse because she had thought very seldom about him since her need of his sympathy no longer existed. How selfish and cruel she had been!

The girl made a sudden movement as if to break the seal pressed by Hannaford's ring, but paused, and taking a hatpin from her hat carefully cut the envelope across the top. Pulling out the folded sheet of paper she turned away even from Vanno, making an excuse that she must have more light.

My One Friend [Hannaford's letter began]: You have many friends, and that is as it should be, but I have only one human being dear enough to be called by the good name of "friend": *You*. And that's why I am writing you now. There's

nobody else I care to write to; but somehow I want you to know that I haven't got a very long lease of life. Doctors tell me this. My heart isn't much good for the ordinary everyday uses a man wants to put his heart to, and soon it may decide to strike work. I feel sure this verdict is a true one, but I wouldn't bother you with my presentiments if it weren't for a certain thing which concerns your future. I may wake up dead — as the Irishman remarked — any morning, and I want you to have whatever is mine to leave behind me. You mustn't object to this, for it's the one thought that gives me pleasure; and honestly there's no one else to whom I can bequeath my worldly goods. All I have worth giving is the Château Lontana and just enough money to make it habitable. I am writing this letter there, on the loggia I told you about. I used to wish it could be arranged for you to come and see my big new toy. I was pretty sure you would like it, for I felt — though you never told me so — that you cared a great deal for beautiful and romantic things.

The Château Lontana in its poetic wilderness of garden is both romantic and beautiful. You could never manage to come; but that doesn't matter now, if I may think of you there when the place is yours. Of course I may hang on in this weary vale for years, but I hope not, because (as I've mentioned more than once) even if I haven't outstayed my welcome, I'm getting more than a little tired of the entertainment provided by that "host who murders all his guests" — the World.

If I should drop off suddenly, you will find my will in the hands of Signor Antonio Nicolini, via Roma, Ventimiglia. He's a nice little Italian lawyer whom I've made my man of business lately. He has all my affairs in charge. It will be the greatest favour and kindness you can do me, if you will take this house I loved but never lived in. This I hope you will do for my sake — the sake of a friend. You know you promised that day at the Rochers Rouges to grant me a favour, and I hold you to your word. Another request I venture to make, you must grant only if you don't find the idea repugnant. It oughtn't to matter much to me one way or the other, and it shall be as you choose, but I should like when my body's cremated (that is to be done in any

case) to have my ashes lie at the south end of the garden, where some steps are cut in the rock coming out at a wonderful view-point. If after death one can see what goes on in this world, it would console me for much to know of your coming sometimes to the Château Lontana, and perhaps sitting on that old stone seat on the rock-platform at the bottom of those steps. There is a wall of rock above the seat, and if a small niche could be cut there for an urn, with a tablet of marble to mark the spot, it would please my fancy. Should you decide to gratify the whim, please have no name carved on the marble, but only a verse you quoted that day at the Rochers Rouges. I think you told me it was by a Scottish poet, whom you liked; and I said the words had in them a strange undertone of music like a lullaby: the sound of the sea, and the sadness and mystery of the sea. You will remember. It was after luncheon was over, but we were still at the table, and you sat with your elbow on the low wall, looking down into the water.

You are not to suppose, though, that because I speak of the sadness of the sea, I am sad in the thought that soon I may be gone where I can no longer hear its voice. I am not sad, and you must not be sad either at my talk of dying, or at my death when it comes. Think of me, but not with sadness. Do not come to see my body before it's given to the burning: do not come to my funeral. I don't want a funeral, for though I am not without a religion of my own, it's one that does not lend itself to ceremonies. As for the mystery of the sea, it and all other mysteries which are hidden from us now will soon, I trust, be clear to

Your ever loyal, faithful friend,

JOHN HANNAFORD.

Long before she reached the end tears were raining down Mary's face. She could not read the letter aloud, yet she wanted the others to know what Hannaford had said. On an impulse she handed the closely covered sheet to Mrs. Winter.

Rose took the letter, and read it out, not quite steadily. For a few seconds no one spoke, when she had finished. But at last she asked in a veiled voice what was the verse Hannaford wished to have on the tablet. The question seemed to Mary the only one she could have answered at that moment.

Almost in a whisper she began to repeat the verse of Fiona Macleod, for which, she remembered, Hannaford had begged twice over, as they two sat on the palm-roofed terrace built over the sea:

"'Play me a lulling chant, O Anthem-Maker,
Out of the fall of lonely seas and the wind's sorrow.
Behind are the burning glens of the sunset sky
Where, like blown ghosts, the seamews
Wail their desolate sea dirges.
Make now of these a lulling chant,
O Anthem-Maker.'"

"That is all?" asked George Winter.

"That is all," Mary echoed.

"I think I understand why a man might want just those words for a last lullaby," Vanno said. "You'll do as he asks, I know, Mary, about the urn and the tablet with the verse, and going there to sit and think of him sometimes."

"Oh, yes, I will do that," she replied quickly. "But — I don't think I can do the other thing. I *can't* live in his house. Anyway, I can't live in it with you, Vanno. It would be ——" She did not finish. To have ended the sentence would have been the same as telling Hannaford's secret,

"I understand," Vanno said. But it was in Mary's mind that he did not and could not wholly understand. She did not even want him to understand. "You needn't live there," he went on. "Yet you can visit the place sometimes, from our 'castle in the air'; and maybe we can think of a way to use the house, if you accept it, which Hannaford would approve."

"You can hardly refuse to accept it now Captain Hannaford is dead," said Rose. "Not to do what he so much hoped you would do for his sake would be — almost treacherous."

"Yes, it seems to me you're bound to take his gift," George Winter added. "If you don't want to live in the house, why not make it a home of rest for women workers who are tired or ill, and need a few weeks of warmth and sunshine, but can't afford even cheap pension prices?"

"Next season we might get up a bazaar to support such a home," Rose suggested, warming to the scheme.

"Perhaps I could support it myself," Mary said, "if Vanno would consent. I haven't lost much more than my Casino winnings, and I should like to do some one good. I've ever so much money of my own. I know very little about such things, but I believe I must be quite rich. And then there's the jewellery I've bought since I came here. I've lost interest in it already. I could sell some to help the Home, couldn't I? The only things I really care for are the pearls, which I have on now under my

dress; and the rest I mean to leave with you, Mrs. Winter, if you don't mind, instead of troubling to take the jewel-case over to the Villa Mirasole."

"Of course I don't mind," Rose said, "except that it's a responsibility. However, thieves aren't looking for 'big hauls' in parsons' houses. I'll store the jewel-case with pleasure; but you must keep the key of the cabinet, lest you should want to open it some day when I am out."

Then they went back to the subject of the Château Lontana, planning how to carry out Hannaford's wishes, even though Mary felt it would be impossible to live in the house. George Winter volunteered to arrange all details concerning the funeral urn and the placing of the tablet, because he had learned to feel an affection for Mary Grant which was almost that of a brother for a very young and beautiful sister. He wanted her, in spite of all, to be happy in her visit to Princess Della Robbia, happy as she could not be if constantly reminded of Hannaford and his tragedy. He offered also to see the lawyer at Ventimiglia, so that Vanno, who proposed soon to go to Rome, might spend his time meanwhile at the Villa Mirasole.

"Don't thank me," the chaplain said at last. "It is but little I'm engaging myself to do. And it's as much for Hannaford's sake as yours. Poor Hannaford! I didn't do half enough for him when he was alive. I feel as if I owed him something now."

Mary did not speak, but she shivered and very

gently drew her hand away from Vanno's. She too felt that she owed Hannaford reparation, not for what she had left undone during his life, but rather for what she had done. She had taken his friendship, his kindness, his sympathy, and given him nothing in return except a little pity following upon repulsion. And she dared not ask herself how far her thoughtlessness was answerable for his death.

XXXII

"A LETTER for the Highness and one waits for answer," announced Americo, with the air of presenting a choice gift, as he bowed to the Princess over a small silver tray.

She was lying among the red cushions of her favourite hammock on the loggia. Beside her in a basket chair was Angelo, with a book in his hand which he did not read, because when Marie was near him everything else seemed irrelevant. Not far away Mary sat, writing a letter to Vanno which ought to reach him the next morning. Yesterday at five o'clock she had seen him off in the Rome express; and before this time he must have arrived.

"Idina Bland's hand," said Angelo, as his wife took a large gray envelope from the silver tray. "I wonder ——" But he did not finish his sentence. To do so would have been superfluous, as in a moment he would know what Idina was writing about; and, besides, Angelo shrank curiously — perhaps foolishly, he sometimes felt — from speaking of Idina Bland or even mentioning her name to Marie. He was not superstitious, or at least, he told himself often that he was not; yet the very thought of his cousin depressed him as if she were a witch

who from any distance could cast a spell of ill-luck upon a house.

Marie had no suspicion of Angelo's feeling for Miss Bland. She knew from him that there had been a "boy and girl flirtation" when Idina had first come to stay at the Duke's country place years ago; and there was enough malice in her to enjoy the idea of a defeated rival's jealousy. For this reason she had found a certain pleasure in Idina's few visits to the Villa Mirasole, though the pale "statue-eyes" had been cold as glass for her. If Idina disliked her a little, Marie had considered it natural, and had been secretly amused, saying nothing to Angelo.

"Miss Bland writes that an American friend of hers has come to stay a day or two only, and she'd like very much to have her meet us and see the villa," Marie announced, glancing through the short letter. "She wants to know if we'd mind asking them to lunch to-day. I suppose we don't mind, do we?" She held the gray sheet out to Angelo, but he did not take it.

"I suppose not," he answered reluctantly. "But it's a bore having a stranger thrust on us. Why not be engaged for luncheon and invite them for tea?"

Marie laughed. "Selfish man! I know what's in your head. You'd go out and leave Mary and me to entertain your dear cousin and her friend. No, I won't have Miss Bland think I'm jealous or inhospitable — for of course she'd blame me. She knows

we never go out for luncheon. Unfortunately I told her. I'll write a line to send back by her messenger, to say lunch by all means."

"Very well, if you think you must." Angelo spoke with gloomy resignation.

"Dear Mary, you write," said Marie lazily. "You've got paper and a stylo, and she doesn't know my hand. I'm too comfortable to move."

Mary put aside her letter to Vanno which must catch the next post, and scribbled a few lines to Miss Bland.

"Will you sign if I bring you the pen?" she asked.

"No, thanks. I give you leave to forge my name. It will soon be your own, so you may as well practise writing it," said Marie. "Just put the initial 'M.'"

The girl obeyed. "M. Della Robbia," she wrote, forming the letters almost lovingly. How strange to think that before long that would be her own name! Mary Della Robbia! The sound was very sweet to her, though to be a princess was of no great importance. If Vanno were a peasant, to become his wife would make her a queen.

When the answer was ready, Americo received it upon his little tray.

"Two ladies for luncheon, you may tell the *chef*," said Marie.

"All right, Highness. And other Highness, I was to make you know from the gardener, one fox have bin catched in a trap on the way to eat the rabbits of the semaphore. If the Highness wish to visit him, he is there for this morning."

"One would think it was an invitation for an 'At Home,'" laughed Marie behind the butler's broad back, as he vanished with the letter, through the window-door. "Fancy, foxes in the woods of Cap Martin, within four miles of Monte Carlo! They ought to be extra cunning."

"They must be," said Angelo, "to keep out of sight as they do in the Season, and yet manage to snatch a meal of rabbit or chicken occasionally. I think I'll stroll over to the semaphore and have a look at the gentleman, as I could hardly believe our gardener the other day when he swore there were foxes and hares in the woods."

"Don't get too interested, and forget to come and receive your dear cousin and her American friend, who for all you know may be the most fascinating woman in the world," Marie called after her husband as he walked away.

His smile named the woman who was above all others for him; and though Marie knew herself his goddess, she never ceased to crave the assurance.

When Angelo had found his Panama and gone down the loggia steps into the garden, she laughed a soft and happy laugh. "Poor darling!" she said. "The fox is an excuse. He won't come back till the last minute. One would think he was afraid of his cousin! It's quite pathetic. Just because he had an innocent flirtation with her a hundred years ago."

Marie picked up Idina's letter, which lay in the hammock. "I wonder what a graphologist — if that's the right word — would make of this hand-

writing? I'm no expert. But to me the writing expresses the woman as I see her: heavy, strong, intelligent, lacking all charm of sex, and selfishly cold."

"Do you think Miss Bland cold?" asked Mary. "I've seen her only once, and I don't pretend to be a judge of character. Yet I had a queer thought about her when we met: that she was like a volcano under snow."

The Princess did not answer, for the character of Idina being of little importance to her, she had already begun to think of something else. She was comfortably glad to be younger and far, far more attractive than Miss Bland. She was resolving that, before the two guests arrived, she would put on a particularly becoming dress in order that the heroine of the old flirtation might more keenly than ever envy Angelo's wife. This idea she did not clothe definitely in words, but it floated in her mind. "Miss Bland must have come down from the Annonciata, to lurk about Mentone waiting for my answer," she said aloud, having reread the note. "Otherwise she wouldn't have time to arrive here for lunch at one, after her messenger got back."

It was now Mary's turn to be inattentive, for she was adding a postscript to her letter, which but for that addition she had finished.

"Marie dreamed of pigeons last night," she scribbled hastily. "She is superstitious about them, and says they mean trouble and parting. That seems rather funny to me, after the hundreds I saw in

Monte Carlo and made friends with, and fed every day. I'm glad I am not superstitious, especially now that you and I are separated. How glorious it is to feel quite sure that *our* parting is only for a few days, instead of forever, like that of our poor lovers of 'Remember eternal.' It was dear of you to have those words engraved inside the ring you gave me. I love the quaint English. And it is like a secret which belongs only to us out of all the world."

"Well!" exclaimed the Princess, after she had tried in vain to attract Mary's notice, "as you're so delightfully occupied, I may as well remove myself and leave you in peace. In less than an hour the fair Idina will be upon us; and I'm going upstairs now to make myself as pretty as Angelo thinks me, to do honour to his cousin. By the way, it's our first luncheon party, not counting you and Vanno and the curé."

She slid out of the red hammock, showing slim ankles that gleamed like marble through a thin film of bronze-brown silk. As she went into the house humming some Italian air she had picked up, Mary thought how young and innocently gay she seemed. It was almost impossible to believe her the same woman who had sobbed behind a disguising veil in Rose Winter's drawing-room, begging Mary to swear by Vanno's love never to betray her secret. And it seemed equally incredible that this mirthful and charming girl could have such a secret to hide. Mary tried to forget. It was a kind of treachery to remember those tears, and the reason for them which

Angelo must not know. To change her thoughts, Mary sprang up swiftly, and, calling Angelo's Persian dog Miro — a lovely white creature like a floating plume — she went out through the woods with her letter for Vanno, meaning to take a short cut among the olives, to a branch post-office not far off.

As she returned a few minutes later, two women walking at a distance under the great silvery arbour watched her run by with the Persian dog.

"That's the girl I told you about, who is going to marry my cousin Giovanni, Prince Della Robbia's younger brother," said Idina Bland to her companion; "the Miss Grant who has been so much talked about here." Idina had a contralto voice, with tones in it almost as deep as those of a very young man. It was musical, and gave an effect of careful training, as if she had studied voice-production and had become self-conscious through over-practising.

"It's strange, the resemblance in those names," the other woman murmured, almost as if speaking to herself. She was small and extremely thin, with insignificant features and sallow, slightly freckled complexion. But, though she was one of those women who might be of any age between twenty-eight and forty, her piercing gray eyes under black eyebrows, her quivering nostrils and slightly pointed chin, gave her a look of intense vitality. She was like a powerful if small electric lamp, purposely veiled by a dun-coloured shade. "It's doubly strange, because" —— she went on; then let her voice trail away into silence rather than break off

abruptly. She had a slight accent suggesting the Middle West of America.

"Because — what?" Miss Bland caught her up with impatience.

The other deliberated before answering. Then she replied: "I'd rather not say anything more yet. I may be mistaken — very likely am. Wait until I've seen your Princess and this girl together. Then — probably I shall know."

Idina Bland glanced at her angrily, and opened her lips, but closed them again, and in silence began to walk on toward the Villa Mirasole. The neat little figure of her friend in its khaki-brown tailor-made dress kept up with her briskly. The bright eyes fixed themselves for an instant on Miss Bland's sullen profile, and twinkled as they turned away. It was as if she enjoyed the knowledge that Idina was afraid to show impatience, as a small, intelligent animal often revels in dominating one that is larger and more important in its own estimation.

When Mary returned to the loggia to gather up the writing materials she had left there, the Princess had come back, wearing a gown which Mary had never seen. It was a silky white taffeta over yellow, and as she moved light seemed to run through the folds like liquid gold.

"'Clothed in samite, mystic, wonderful,'" Mary quoted.

"This is Angelo's favourite frock," said Marie. "He thinks" — her tone changed to bitterness — "that I look like a saint in it."

Mary made no comment. She felt that Marie was commanding her to silence. But it was true: this gleaming dress with its white and golden lights, and a filmy fichu crossed meekly over the breast, gave Marie a look of sweet and virginal innocence. Her head, on the long white throat rising out of the pointed folds, seemed delicately balanced as an aigrette.

"Do you think I shall be able to hold my own against the lovely ladies who are coming?" she asked lightly, snatching up her sleigh-bell gayety again.

"I feel sure you will," Mary replied in the same tone. Just then they faintly heard the electric bell which told that the guests had arrived, earlier than expected. Afterward Mary often remembered this question of the Princess' and her own answer.

Americo brought Miss Bland and her friend out to the loggia, which was the living-room of the family in warm, sunny weather. He announced the two names with elaborate unintelligibility, but Idina at once introduced her companion as Miss Jewett of St. Louis. "We met when I was in America," she explained. "Now she's 'doing' Europe in a few weeks, cramming in enough sightseeing for an Englishman's year."

"We're very flattered to be included among the sights," Marie said, smiling, but with something of the "princess" air which — perhaps unconsciously — she always put on with her husband's cousin. Miss Jewett, making some polite and formal little answer,

gazed with glittering intentness at her hostess and Mary Grant. Her eyes, in the thin, sallow face with its pointed chin, were so brilliantly intelligent that they seemed to have a life and individuality of their own, separate from the rest of her small body.

"Where's Angelo?" asked Idina, when they had talked for a little while, and she had apologized for being too early.

"Oh, I'm so sorry he isn't at home!" Marie exclaimed, enjoying the blank disappointment that dulled Idina's expression. When she had produced her effect, she added that Angelo would come back in time for luncheon. Miss Bland turned her face away and looked down at a fountain on the terrace below the loggia. Fierceness flashed out of her like a knife unsheathed; but the back of her blond head, with its conventional dressing of the hair under a neat toque, was almost singularly non-committal.

Marie went on to make conversation about the fox Angelo had gone to see, laughingly describing the "fauna" of Cap Martin, of which season visitors knew little. "They say, as soon as everybody's well out of the way, the most wonderful birds and flowers appear, that only scientific people can tell anything about," she informed her visitors. Miss Jewett listened with interest and asked questions; but a curtain seemed to have been lowered behind Idina's eyes, shutting her mind away from outside things.

In the yellow drawing-room a clock tinkled out a tune, finishing with one sharp stroke; and Americo

hovered uncertainly at the door-window of the big hall, seeing that his master was not with the ladies on the loggia.

"We must wait a few minutes, Americo," Marie said calmly; but at the same moment Angelo appeared on the fountain terrace, and came quickly up the loggia steps. He shook hands with Idina and greeted Miss Jewett with the grave, pleasant courtesy that was not unlike Vanno's, but colder and more remote, except with those for whom he really cared.

Mary wondered if Miss Bland felt the chill of his manner.

They went in to luncheon, and the conversation was of abstract things. If once or twice it seemed that Idina wished to turn the talk to old days which had given memories in common to her and Angelo, the Prince checked her quietly by asking some question about Ireland or America. And it struck Mary, who was feeling vaguely sorry for this cousin held at arm's length, that Miss Jewett watched Idina with interest and even curiosity, as if she were waiting for her to do or say something in particular.

At last the Princess rose, smiling at Miss Bland. "Shall we have coffee on the loggia?" she asked.

"We should both like that, shouldn't we, Miss Jewett?" Idina said, with almost unnecessary emphasis. As she spoke, she looked at her friend.

Angelo opened the door for them to pass out, and it was evident that he did not mean to follow at once. Seeing his intention, Idina stopped. "Aren't you coming with us, Angelo?" she asked.

"I thought of smoking a cigar and joining you later," he answered.

"Please come," she said. "Miss Jewett and I won't be staying long; and I'm leaving with her to-morrow. I've only been hanging on here for her to arrive. Nothing else would have kept me so long."

"I will come with pleasure," Angelo said. "My cigar can wait."

"Doesn't your wife let you smoke when you're with her?" Idina asked sharply.

"Of course I let him!" exclaimed Marie, "though sometimes on the loggia he won't if the wind blows the smoke in our faces. To-day there's no wind, and we'll all smoke except Mary, who hates it. I'm sure you're more modern?"

"I'm afraid I too am old-fashioned," said Idina.

"And I'm too nervous," added her friend.

"I should like to see Angelo smoke to-day," Idina went on. "It will remind me of old times. There's a balcony at Monte Della Robbia where we used to sit by moonlight sometimes, and while Angelo smoked I told him Irish fairy stories which he loved to hear. He was romantic and poetic in those days. Now I have another story to tell — not a fairy story this time. Still, it's quite interesting. At least, I think it is, and I want to see whether you agree with me — especially Angelo."

He gazed at her questioningly as she sat down on a sofa opposite to him. He stood with his back against a marble pillar, and in his eyes was the look

that comes to the eyes of a lion teased by a boy whom he cannot reach through the bars of his cage.

"It's a story in which Miss Jewett's been collaborating with me," Idina continued. "Between us we've brought it to a fine point. I couldn't go on a step more till she came. You can imagine how tired I was of waiting, for I wanted to be at work. Now we've gathered up all our threads."

The baited look faded from Angelo's eyes. "You're writing a novel together?" he asked, smiling faintly.

"We've been piecing together a plot which might make a novel," said Idina. "That's why I wanted you to come out with us, instead of smoking your cigar in the house. I'd like to tell the story and see what you think of it, because I believe you are a very good judge. And a man's opinion of such things is always valuable. But please smoke! I won't begin till you do. I want that reminder of old times to give me inspiration."

Angelo, entirely at his ease now, though still slightly bored, lit his cigar. The pillar against which he leaned was close to Marie's red hammock. He could look down at her while he smoked, and as she swung back and forth her dress all but brushed his knee.

"Our heroine is an English girl, or perhaps Scottish, we haven't decided which," Idina began in her deep voice. "She's pretty, fascinating to men, in fact a man's woman. To other women she is a cat. And she's by nature as deceitful as all creatures of the cat tribe."

"Why take such a person for your heroine?" Angelo wanted to know.

"She's thrust upon us by the exigencies of the story. And, besides — why, Angelo, if you could meet the girl as I see her in real life, you'd admire her beyond anything! She would be exactly your style. You, being a man, wouldn't know that she was deceitful and a cat."

"I'm sure I should know," he protested, with an involuntary glance at Marie, so saintlike and virginal in her meekly fichued dress. "You've just said that you considered me a good judge."

"Not of a woman's character, but of what ought to happen to the heroine of our story in the end," Idina explained. "That's what I meant. You must give us the end of the story. But I'll go on. The girl — our heroine — comes upon the scene first at a convent-school in Scotland."

Idina paused for an instant, as if taking thought how to go on. The faint creaking of the hammock chains abruptly ceased. Mary glanced across at her friend, but Princess Della Robbia had stopped swinging only to lean forward and stroke the beautiful Persian dog Miro, who had come up the steps. She put an arm round his neck and bent her head over him. Though he adored his master exclusively, he tolerated the new member of the family, and yielded himself reservedly to her caress.

"It must be a coincidence about the convent," Mary told herself. Why should Miss Bland wish to torture Angelo's wife, even if she knew anything?

And she could not know. It was impossible that she should know. But suddenly the girl remembered Marie's hints about a long-ago flirtation between the cousins. And Idina's manner had been odd when she begged Angelo to smoke because of old times. A dreadful idea opened a door in Mary's mind and leered at her, with the wicked eyes of a face seen in a nightmare, vague, yet growing larger and drawing inevitably near. She felt helpless and frozen as in a nightmare too; for she could do nothing to rescue Marie, if need arose. To stop Idina somehow might be possible, yet surely that would do more harm than good. To show fear would be to acknowledge cause for fear. Yet at this moment of suspense Mary would have given her right hand to be cut off, if that could have saved her friend.

"Our heroine is the last person who ought to be put into a convent-school," Idina went on, "for she cares more about flirting and fun and intrigue than anything else. Being shut up with a lot of girls and religious women bores her dreadfully, and after she's been there for a while she looks round for a little amusement. The pupils are allowed to go out sometimes, and she meets a man who's staying in a big country-house near by. He looks at her, and she looks back at him. That settles everything. He contrives to find out her name. Men are clever about such things. Then he begins smuggling letters for the girl into the convent. She consents to see him in the garden at night, if he can climb over the wall, or manage to get in somehow. He does man-

age it. All this appeals to her vanity and love of intrigue. She has a new interest in life — and a secret. They have these night meetings often. By and by the man begs the girl to run away with him. He says he will marry her at once, of course. He's good-looking and seems to be rich; and he's staying in the house of a Lord Somebody or Other, so she thinks he must be of importance in the world. She herself is — just nobody, with hardly a penny of her own, and only distant relatives who've put her in the convent to get rid of the bother she made them. But when our heroine has escaped in the most romantic fashion with her lover, she soon discovers that he can't marry her, even if he wished, for he has a wife already. And it's the wife who owns all the money. They don't live together, but they are quite good friends, he and his wife, who's a common sort of person, a beer-heiress or something like that. What do you think of our story so far, Angelo? Isn't it a good plot?"

Angelo had been smoking continuously as his cousin talked, sending out little quick puffs of smoke which, to those who knew him, betrayed annoyance. And Idina knew him well.

"Do you want me to say what I really think, or to pay you compliments?" he asked.

"What you really think, of course."

"Then, there's nothing new or original in your plot, to excuse its — unpleasantness."

"But if it happens to be true?"

"Many unpleasant things are true, but why rake

them up unless there's something great in the theme that makes them worth retelling?"

"It's too soon to judge yet. You haven't heard the best part. What do you think of the story, Princess?"

Marie, who had not ceased caressing the dog, listening with her cheek pillowed on his silken forehead, lifted her face and returned Idina's look. As she raised her head, Mary's heart gave a bound which took her breath away. But it was she whose eyes were dilated, whose face was feverishly flushed, whose breast rose and fell as if a hammer were pounding within. The Princess was white, but scarcely whiter than usual. Her lips were pale, and rather dry, as if she had been motoring in a chilly wind. She was smiling; and if the smile were slightly strained and photographic, perhaps only one who watched her in the anxiety of love would have felt the subtle difference.

"I'm afraid Angelo's right," she said. "It's not a particularly original plot. And — forgive me — your heroine isn't of a very interesting type, is she? Intriguing, cold, ambitious, catty. One reads of women who give themselves to men without love, but — they don't seem natural, at least to me. I believe you must be mistaken in thinking your plot is a true story."

"I can prove its truth," said Idina, quietly. "At least Miss Jewett can. She has been getting the materials. That's her business. She's celebrated for it in America."

"Then I daresay you can work this up into something worth reading, for a certain sort of book," Marie answered. "But — just in the telling it isn't quite — quite — well, Angelo and I can stand it of course, but Mary — I must think of her, you know. And I don't see how our opinion can be of much use to you and Miss Jewett. So what is the use ——"

"Of going on?" Idina caught her up, in a voice of iron or steel. "But I particularly want Angelo's opinion as to what the end of the story should be. It's for a man to judge. If it bores you to listen, and you don't think it's proper for Miss Grant ——" She paused significantly, and her look flung venom. But she had not fully counted on her cousin's loyalty to his wife, his indifference, almost amounting to dislike at last, for herself.

"Don't you feel, Idina," he interposed with a deadly quietness she knew to be a danger-signal, "that any story which — er — bores my wife had better be left untold in her house? If you really wish to have my opinion on this plot of which you think so much, write the rest out for me, and I'll let you have my verdict."

With a swift movement Idina stood up. For once the statue-white face was flushed with a dull, disagreeable red which made her almost ugly. She looked tall and forbidding. "Write!" she repeated in a tone of suppressed fury, deep as a man's. "Do you think my letter would ever come to your eyes? *She* would destroy it before it could get to you — cunning cat that she is. You fool,

it's her story I've been telling you — your wife's. She lived with that man — went to Russia with him ——"

"Be silent!"

The two words cut short the torrent pouring from Idina's lips, as a block of ice might dam a rushing stream. But it was the look in Angelo's eyes, even more than his command, which shocked Idina into silence. She knew then that as much as he loved his wife, he hated her, Idina, and that nothing on earth could ever change his hate back into indifference. She knew that if she were a man he would by this time have killed her. The knowledge was anguish almost beyond bearing, yet the irrevocability of what she had done spurred her on after the first instant.

"I'll *not* be silent!" she panted. "For your father's sake. You've disgraced him in marrying this woman ——"

"Go," Angelo said, "unless you wish to be turned out by my servants, you and your friend whom you brought here on false pretences."

"I didn't know how she was going to work this thing," Miss Jewett protested hastily. "If I had, I wouldn't ——"

"It does not matter," Angelo said.

"But it does matter. Everything matters," Marie broke in, her quiet, alert, almost businesslike tone a surprise to her friend. "Don't send them away yet, Angelo — in justice to me. I know you don't believe things against me — of course not. Perhaps

you would not believe, even if they could seem to prove anything, which they couldn't do. Things that aren't true can't be proved really, by the most cruel and malicious people. But maybe if you sent Miss Bland and her detective friend out of the house now, you might sometimes think of what you've heard, in spite of yourself — in the night, when dreadful thoughts seem almost true — and that would kill me. Besides, these women might spread tales. And that would distress your father. I must justify myself — not in your eyes; that isn't needed; but in theirs. I must do it — even at the awful expense of sacrificing another. Two names very much alike have made this mischief. Angelo, it was Mary Grant who was at that convent-school in Scotland, where Miss Jewett must have been spying for your cousin. I'd have saved poor Mary if I could. But you come first with me—first, before everything and every one. Ask her if what I say of her is not the truth."

Mary turned and looked at her friend. She was very still. Her heart, which had pounded in her bosom, moving the laces of her blouse, might almost have ceased beating. She appeared hardly to breathe. But through her large, soft eyes her soul seemed to pour itself out in a crystalline ray, piercing to the soul of Marie. And to the woman who had used the heart of her friend for a shield came a sudden and terrible thought. She remembered a passage in the Gospels where Judas led the Roman soldiers by night to the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus,

speaking no word, turned and looked at the betrayer. It was as if she saw a picture of this betrayal, beside the picture of herself leaning forward in the red hammock, with Angelo beside her and Mary's clear eyes questioning hers. She could have cried out aloud, and falling on her knees have confessed everything, begging God's forgiveness and Angelo's and Mary's. But instead, because she clung to this one desperate hope of keeping Angelo, she sat erect and firm, her ice-cold hands tightly grasping the edge of the hammock, one on either side of her body. If she had let go or tried to stand up, she knew that she must have collapsed. Grasping the edge of the hammock seemed to lend strength and power of endurance not only to her body but to her spirit as well. She gave back Mary's gaze steadily, and was hardly aware of turning her eyes for an instant from the still, pure face which had never looked so gentle or so sweet; yet she must have glanced away, for she warmed slowly with the consciousness that Idina Bland was confused, and that Miss Jewett too was under the influence of some new emotion which made her appear less hard, less dry, more like a human being. Hope ran through the veins of Marie in a vital tide. The desperate instinct of self-preservation had put the right weapon in her hand. She must go on and use it mercilessly, for she had touched the weak spot in her enemy's armour. Those two women did not know everything, after all. Idina had somehow overreached herself. It was certain that the allies were pausing to recover strength.

"Are you the woman to whom my cousin refers, Miss Grant?" Angelo asked; and his voice was the voice of the judge, not the protector.

Mary thought of Vanno. The very likeness between this cold voice and the dear, warm voice of the absent one made the thought a pang. Her eyes filled with tears. Still she was silent.

"Am I to take your silence as assent?" Angelo asked again, when he had waited in vain for her to speak, and the waiting had seemed long to both.

Mary was sitting almost opposite the hammock, in a chair turned slightly away from it, so that she faced Angelo more fully than she faced Marie, unless she moved her head purposely, as she had moved it when her eyes questioned the eyes of her friend. Her hands were loosely clasped in her lap; and without answering she slowly bowed her head over them. As she did so, her eyes fell upon the ring Vanno had slipped on her finger with a kiss that was a pledge, the ring with "Remember eternal" written inside. The sight of it was a knock at her heart, like the knock of a rescuer on the door of a beleaguered castle. She did not speak, in her own defence, for silence was defence of Marie. And little knowing how she would be tried, she had sworn to defend her friend, sworn by Vanno's love and her own love for Vanno. It was a vow she would not break if she could, lest a curse fall in punishment and kill the love which was her dearest treasure. Yet through all the echoing confusion in her mind one note rang clear: she must in the end right herself with Vanno.

It was almost as much for his sake as Marie's, she felt dimly, that she must keep her promise now and endure this shame, this martyrdom; for Marie was Angelo's wife, and Angelo was Vanno's beloved brother whose sorrow would be Vanno's sorrow, whose dishonour would be the family's dishonour. But as she looked at his ring, through the thick mist of her tears, Mary comforted herself by saying: "Somehow it must come right. I can sacrifice myself now, but not for always. In some way I will let Vanno know."

She thought vaguely, stumblingly, her ideas astray and groping like blind men in an earthquake, knowing not where to turn for safety. And as she thought, Miss Jewett was speaking. Mary heard what the American woman said only as an undertone to the clamour in her own brain; but at last the sense of the words and what they might mean for herself sprang out of darkness like the white arm of a searchlight.

"In justice to Princess Della Robbia and to me — though maybe you won't care much about that — you must hear what I've got to tell you," Miss Jewett said imperatively to Angelo. "It's true I'm a detective. I'm not ashamed of it. I've made a reputation that way. But I'm human. I didn't come here to be a beast. I'd no idea what Miss Bland was up to. I thought she wanted me to look at the Princess, and know whether I'd seen her picture at the Convent of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake, in Scotland. I went there on Miss Bland's business, while she waited here, near your house, so as to be

on the spot when I came along with news. It was in America she first engaged me to do the work. She said her cousin the Duke di Rienzi wasn't satisfied with his son's marriage, and wanted to find out something about the lady. It was all one to me, so long as I was paid. And I have been paid. But if she offered me twice as much I wouldn't do the thing over again; and I won't raise a finger for her if she wants any more done. She can do her own dirty work. She said her cousin the Duke told her his new daughter-in-law was an artist in Dresden, and she sent me there. I got off the track a bit, but some things I heard sent me on to St. Petersburg. There had been a Mary Gaunt or Grant stopping there once in a hotel, with a man she wasn't married to; that's certain — and she came with him from Paris. From Paris I traced her — that is, I traced a Mary Grant — back to Scotland and a convent-school. The last place I went — while Miss Bland waited here keeping her eye on you all from a distance, and maybe spying out things on her own account — was that convent. I raked up old gossip outside, and I got in easily enough, for the Mother Superior and the nuns are nice to visitors who seem interested. But the minute I began to ask questions about a pupil in the school who'd run away, the good ladies shut up like oysters. I had to leave defeated as far as the last part of my job was concerned, though I'm not used to fail. One thing I did accomplish, though: I looked hard at a picture in the reception room, with a lot of girls in it, pupils of the school, and

I memorized every face. *The Princess was not there;* but this young lady was; and her name I find now is Mary Grant. Unfortunately she's been a good deal talked about in Monte Carlo, it seems. Miss Bland knows that. I saw her in the woods but couldn't be certain at a distance, so I said nothing then to Miss Bland. Since then she hasn't given me time. And now whatever happens, I wash my hands of the whole business."

Angelo had listened quietly, after realizing that Miss Jewett's object was to justify his wife, not to incriminate her. And though Marie needed no justification in his eyes, it was well that Idina should hear it from the lips of her own paid employé.

When the self-confessed detective had finished, he turned upon his cousin eyes of implacable coldness.

"You are punished for your malevolence," he said, "though to my mind no punishment could be severe enough. Go, with your humiliation, the knowledge of your failure and my contempt for you. If possible, you have made me love my wife better than ever. But before you go, understand this: if you attempt to attack her again — if I hear of any malicious gossip, as I shall hear, provided you utter it — I shall pursue you with the law. Without any fear of exposure, since there is nothing to expose, I will prosecute you for slander, and you will go to prison. This is no empty threat. It is a warning. And it is all I have to say."

He walked swiftly to the end of the loggia and touched an electric bell on the house-wall. While

Idina Bland and Miss Jewett stood in silence Americo came, smiling as usual, to the door-window.

"These ladies are going," announced the Prince. "Show them out."

When they had gone, he went at once to Marie, and taking her hand, kissed it tenderly. "My darling, this has been very trying for you," he said. "You are not strong. Now it is my wish that you go to your room and lie down. Soon I will come to you, but first I must talk for a little while with Miss Grant."

Until an hour ago he had called her Mary.

With an arm round her waist, Angelo lifted Marie from the hammock, and began to lead her toward the door, but she resisted feebly. "Angelo, I can't go!" she stammered. "I can't leave Mary with you — like this. I must stay. I ——"

"Dear one, I wish you to go," Angelo insisted gently. "It is right for you to go. Trust me to be neither cruel nor unkind to Miss Grant."

"But ——"

"There is no 'but.'" Angelo had her at the door; and resigning herself, with one backward look at Mary imploring pardon and mercy, the Princess went out.

Mary saw, though she scarcely troubled to read the look. She pitied Marie, but pitied her as a coward. The girl meant to be loyal, yet somehow, in the end, to save her own happiness. But she could not plan for the future. She felt dazed, broken, as if she had been on the rack and was now to be tortured again.

XXXIII

In a moment Angelo had softly closed the glass door after Marie, and had come back. He stood before Mary, looking down at her. At first she did not raise her eyes, but his drew hers to them. They gazed at her with a cold anger that was like fire burning behind a screen of ice. And the ice made the fire more terrible.

His look bade her rise and stand before him, a culprit, but she would not. She sat still, in the same chair where she had sat happily writing to Vanno a few hours before. Though she trembled, she faced the Prince without shrinking outwardly. Perhaps to Angelo's eyes she appeared defiant.

"Does my brother know?" he asked.

"He knows — that I was at a convent-school." In spite of herself Mary choked in the words. She stammered slightly, and a wave of giddiness swept over her. With a supreme effort she controlled herself, looking up at Angelo's tall figure, which to her loomed Titanic.

"I mean does he know the rest?"

"There is nothing else to know. I did not do any of those things Miss Bland talked about."

"Very well. But you must see that you will have

to prove that, before you can show yourself worthy to be my brother's wife."

It was on Mary's lips to exclaim: "I can prove it easily!" But just in time she remembered that, to prove her own innocence — as indeed she very easily could — she would have to prove Marie's guilt. This could not be avoided. The guilty one in throwing the blame upon another had been as one who jumps into the sea to avoid fire. Mary could save her friend from the waves only by giving up her own boat; for in that boat there was not room for two.

Fear brushed the girl's spirit like the wing of a bat in the dark. Safety for her with Vanno began to seem far off and more difficult to attain than she had dreamed when, by silence, she kept her promise to Marie. And what she had done was largely for Vanno's sake, she repeated to herself once again. The Princess was his sister-in-law. Her honour was the Della Robbia's honour.

A way must open. Light must come.

"I think," Mary said, trying not to let the words falter on her lips, "Vanno won't want proof." But as she spoke, even before she finished, she recalled how Vanno had at first believed appearances and gossip against her. Of course it would be different now that he knew her heart and soul. Still, the bat's wings flapped in the night of her darkening fear. And Marie's words of the other day echoed in her memory. "The brothers are alike . . . they adore purity . . . and they have a pitying horror of women who aren't innocent." Could

Vanno believe her not innocent — now? Could his eyes — "stars of love," Marie had called his and Angelo's — could his eyes that had adored, look at her with the dreadful coldness of Angelo's at this moment, the coldness which would be death for Marie?

As something far down within herself asked the question, another thought stood out clear and sharp-cut. She had promised Marie not to tell Vanno, not even to "tell a priest in confession." Yet she must tell, for after all that had happened she could not bear to let Vanno take her on faith alone.

Angelo's answer came like a confirmation of her resolve.

"It's not only a question of what Vanno may want," he said, with a very evident effort not to be harsh to a woman, defenceless if guilty. "You don't seem to realize, Miss Grant, that — both he and I owe something to our father — to our forefathers. The men of our family have done things they ought not to do. History tells of them. But history tells also that they have never taken wives unworthy to be the mothers of noble sons."

Then at last Mary rose swiftly, bidden to her feet not by Angelo's haughty eyes but by her own pride of womanhood, and resentment of the whip with which he had dared to lash her.

"If Vanno were here he would kill you!" the strange something that was not herself cried out in a voice that was not hers.

Angelo's face hardened as he looked down at her with a bitter contempt.

"So you would rejoice in bringing strife between brothers!" he said. "I had not yet thought so badly of you as that. But there are such women. It was almost incredible to me at first that you — in face a sweet young girl — could have accepted Vanno's love without telling him about — your past, and at least giving him the chance to choose. Now I begin to see you in a different light."

"You see me in a false light," Mary said passionately. "You tortured that out of me — about Vanno. I didn't mean it. I'd rather die this moment than bring strife between you. I know he loves you dearly. But if you loved him as well, you couldn't have spoken as you did to me. I too am dear to him."

"It is because I love Vanno that I had to speak so," Angelo persisted, not softening at all. "I am his elder brother. Soon, I fear, I shall be the head of our house. It is my duty to protect him."

"Against me?"

"Against you — if you make it necessary."

"I told you and I tell you again," Mary cried in exasperation, "that I have done nothing wrong. There's nothing in my 'past' to confess. If I haven't talked much to Vanno about it, that's because there was so much else to say."

"How old are you, Miss Grant?" Angelo put the question abruptly.

"Twenty-five," she replied without hesitation, though puzzled at the seeming irrelevance.

"Ah! I happen to know that Vanno believes you to be under twenty."

"I never said so. I would have told him my age if I had thought of it."

"He spoke of you to me, before we met, as a 'child not yet past her teens, and just out of a convent-school.' How long do you say it is since you were a pupil at that convent, where I believe you admit having been — St. Ursula-of-the-Lake, in Scotland?"

"It's almost four years since I was a pupil, but——" She checked herself in haste. In another instant she would have said a thing which might have opened the eyes of Marie's husband on some dim vision of the truth.

"I will answer no more questions from you, Prince Della Robbia," she said, with an almost stern dignity which had never been hers. Angelo felt this, but it made him see her as a woman more dangerous to Vanno than he had supposed, because it revealed in her unexpected strength, tenacity, and even subtlety.

"Very well," he replied. "It is your right to refuse. But this you must understand. I shall not permit my brother to marry you in ignorance of — we will say the stories told of your past, since you deny their truth. If you refuse to tell him, I myself will do it. I will tell him exactly what has happened to-day. And I shall see that the detective whom Idina employed against my wife does not go away before Vanno returns, at any rate without leaving her address. Also I must say

this: I cannot compel my brother to give you up if he chooses you as his wife in spite of all, and if you love him little enough to do him so great a wrong. But I can control my wife's actions. Frankly, I do not consider you the right companion for her."

Mary's cheeks blazed, not with shame but with indignation. She quivered from head to foot with anger such as she had not known that she could feel. Never had she experienced so strong a temptation as now, when she burned to fling the truth in this man's haughty face. How it would change if she accused the wife he put so far above her! And how easily she could prove that the burden of guilt was Marie's. It was as if in a vivid lightning-flash she saw Angelo withered by the knowledge, his pride in the dust; and a tigress instinct of revenge leaped into life, longing to see him thus in reality, burning to use her power to crush and annihilate his happiness forever. But she fought with herself and resisted. For an instant she was silent, gathering the reins of self-control. Then she said only: "I will go away from your house at once, Prince Della Robbia."

"That must be as you wish," he replied. "I do not ask you to go."

"You believe unspeakable things of me. That is the same as telling me to go. In my country they suppose people innocent until they're proved guilty. With you, it seems to be different. Without waiting for proof, you take it for granted that I'm guilty, that I've deceived Vanno and you."

"Your silence when you might have defended your-

self from Miss Bland and from the American woman was proof in itself. If you are not the person concerned in their story, surely you would have denied your identity with her. You said nothing. You bowed your head under the storm. Only now, when you're alone with me, knowing me to be ignorant of any facts against you, do you raise it again. But enough of recrimination. Vanno can decide for himself when he comes, and when he knows all from you or me. Meanwhile you may stay in my house if you choose. I offer you its shelter because you are a woman alone and because my brother who loves you put you under my protection. But I do not intend that my wife shall have any further communication with you; and to prevent talk among the servants which might spread outside, I suggest that if you remain you keep your room, as an invalid, until Vanno returns."

"I thank you for your consideration," Mary said bitterly, "but I shall not stay. I shall pack my things immediately myself; for I will not be helped by one of your servants, or owe anything more to you. When Vanno comes, as you say, he can decide for himself."

"You will write to him?" Angelo inquired.

"I will write to him. And you need have no further trouble with anything that concerns me."

Without another word, or a look at him, she turned away and walked into the house.

Almost mechanically she went upstairs to the pretty room that had been hers. She was too in-

tensely excited to think. She could only feel. And throughout her whole life she had felt about her thoughts, rather than thought about her feelings. Less than ever did she try to analyze them now. She hastily gathered her things together, and piled them without folding into trunks and dressing-bag. She had not made up her mind where to go or what to do. The first thing and the most important thing was to get away from this house. Once away, breathing freer air, it would be time enough to plan.

As she packed furiously and unskilfully, she feared that Marie might come in and beg her forgiveness or try to explain. She felt that she could not bear this. And she shrank from the idea of seeing Marie again. She was afraid that she might be tempted to say something terrible. The one clear thought in her brain was the thought of Vanno; and he was in her mind as an image rather than a thought. She said over and over to herself almost stupidly as she prepared to leave Angelo's house: "If only Vanno were here — if only Vanno were here!"

Before she was ready to go she suddenly remembered that she must have a cab. Nothing would induce her to take Prince Della Robbia's car, even if it were offered. She rang for a servant, gave a generous present of money, and said that she had received news calling her away at once. A carriage must be found quickly.

As it happened, the descendant of the great French family was stationed at the edge of the olive wood with his little victoria. The weather had changed

since morning. The mistral had begun to blow, and Jacques had found little to do, for people were keeping indoors. When Mary started, with one trunk on the front of the little cab, the world was very different from the happy blue and gold world of the morning. Had she been on foot, the gale sweeping down from Provence would have blown her like a rag from the path; and the small but sturdy horse seemed to lean on a wall of wind as he trotted toward Monte Carlo.

Mary had resolved to beg Rose Winter for a night's shelter. She believed it might be possible, without betraying the secret, to tell Rose that something disturbing had happened which had decided her to leave Prince Della Robbia's house. She felt sure of advice and welcome from the Winters, and she thought it probable that they would ask her to stop longer than the night; but she made up her mind in advance not to accept such an invitation. People who knew that she was visiting Princess Della Robbia would talk if they saw her in Monte Carlo, especially while Vanno was away. There had been more than enough gossip already. When she started for Monte Carlo she had no idea where to go after leaving Rose, as she determined to do next day; but it was as if a voice came to her on the wind, saying: "Why not stay at the Château Lontana?"

Mary caught at the suggestion. She had felt vaguely guilty in deciding that she could not grant Hannaford's wish, and live in his villa. It had seemed impossible to be happy there. She had thought that

tragic memories would haunt the house and echo through the rooms, though strangers who knew nothing of Hannaford's story might find it a pleasant place. But now she was not asking or expecting happiness for the present. She wanted a refuge, where she might think and wait quietly, out of gossip's way — a place whence she could write Vanno: "When you come you will find me here."

As she said these words in her mind they took a different form. "*If* you come," she began; then stopped hastily and changed the "if" to "when." Vanno would come. She had done nothing because of which she deserved to lose him, and she would not lose him. Somehow, everything must be made to come right. She would think of a way.

In front of the big, balconied building where the Winters lived Jacques stopped and put Mary's small trunk and dressing-bag inside the door, while his little white horse stood tranquilly among passing motors. She asked him to call later at the Villa Mirasole for her other luggage, which she had already packed and labelled, and take it to the cloak-room at Monte Carlo railway station, where it could be called for. Then she paid him generously for everything, and won the man's heart by saying goodbye to his miniature dog, Pomponette.

Mary had no doubt that the Winters would take her in for the night; and it was a blow to be told by Nathalie that Monsieur and Madame had gone to Nice to bring back the aunt of Monsieur who had fallen ill at a hotel. They would return by the train

arriving at seven. Would Mademoiselle wait or look in again?

Mary hesitated, not knowing how to rearrange her plans. It was evident, as the dreaded aunt had come down upon them after all, that the Winters could not keep another guest even for a night, unless they made a bed in the drawing-room, or the chaplain went out and gave up his share of Rose's room. But Mary did not think for an instant of putting her friends to this inconvenience.

"No, thank you," she said, recovering from the first shock of disappointment. "Tell Madame I regret very much not seeing her, but I called to get my jewel-case which she kindly kept for me. And — say that I will write."

Already Mary had made up her mind that she must go at once to the Château Lontana. She knew that Hannaford had put in a caretaker when he bought the place — a woman he had described as an interesting creature "discovered" in some odd way. What the way was, or precisely what Hannaford had said of the woman, Mary had forgotten; for she had often listened absent-mindedly to Hannaford's talk of his beloved villa and all concerning it; but the great thing was the certainty that a woman lived in the house. Mary could go there alone without fear.

She was glad that Rose had given her the key of the cabinet in which her jewel-case was kept, because she had very little money, and as it was already five o'clock the banks would be shut. It

would not be an agreeable necessity, but she could go to the jeweller in the Galerie Charles Trois where she had bought many of her beautiful things and, explaining that she needed ready money, ask him to buy back a diamond pendant or brooch.

When she had taken the jewel-case, which was in the shape of an inconspicuous hand bag, she gave Nathalie the key of the cabinet, and said nothing of the luggage waiting on the ground floor. She knew it would grieve George and Rose Winter to guess that she had come expecting to stay. Downstairs she spoke to the concierge, saying she would return with a cab to fetch the things away. She would go, she thought, to the railway station and inquire about trains for Ventimiglia. Then having settled the hour of departure, she would dispose of a little jewellery and call in a cab at the Winters' for her luggage.

The sun had set, and the early darkness of the Riviera night had fallen, though it was only five o'clock, but the Boulevard d'Italie and the Boulevard des Moulins were brilliantly lighted. The shops looked bright and enticing, but Mary did not notice them as she would once have done. She walked quickly, and at the top of the gardens was about to turn down toward the Casino and more distant railway station when she came upon Lord and Lady Dauntrey.

If she could she would have avoided them, but it was too late. They were standing together, talking with great earnestness, and Mary had brushed

against Lord Dauntrey's shoulder on the narrow pavement before she recognized the pair. Both turned with a start, as if they had been brought back by a touch from dreams to reality; and a street lamp on the opposite side of the gardens lighted up their features with a cruel distinctness. Instantly Mary knew that some terrible thing had happened. Lord Dauntrey was like a man under sentence of death, and though his wife's expression was not to be read at a glance, the look in her eyes arrested Mary. The girl stopped involuntarily, as if Eve had seized her by the arm. "What is the matter?" she asked, without any preface of greeting. A conventional "How do you do?" would have been an insulting mockery flung at those set, white faces.

"For God's sake, tell her not to drive me mad," Dauntrey said in a voice which was strange to Mary. It was not like his, though she had heard him speak raspingly when ill luck at the tables had depressed him. It seemed to her that such a voice might come from one shut up in a cell, or from a man enclosed in armour with visor down. It was a voice that frightened her.

"Oh, Lady Dauntrey, what does he mean?"

Eve caught the girl by the hand, holding it tightly, as if she feared that she might take alarm and run away.

"I've told him that I shall hate him if he's a coward," she answered in a voice cold and hard as iron.

"If I'm a coward, what are you?" Dauntrey re-

torted. "You want me to crawl to those people for a few wretched louis, and you're too selfish to stick by me through it all. I've told you I'd go, if you'd go with me."

"I won't!" Eve flung at him. "You ought to be ashamed to ask it. Coward! He's brought us to this, and now he's afraid to do the one thing that can help."

"Please, please, let me go away," pleaded Mary, sick with shame for both, and for herself because she was a witness of the scene. "I oughtn't to be hearing this. I — unless I can do some good ——"

"*You* can go with him, if you want to do good," Eve cut her short almost savagely. "I'm broken — done! But you — you've nothing to ask them for yourself. You might see him through, if he's too weak to go alone. We're down, both of us, in the mud; but you're high up in the world. You're of importance now. Maybe they'd do for you what they wouldn't for one of us."

"I don't know what you mean. I'm in the dark."

"How could she know?" Dauntrey asked his wife, controlling his rage.

"We've lost everything in this beautiful hell," Eve explained sullenly. "Haven't you heard any news of us this last week?"

"No, nothing — nothing."

"It began with a row at a hotel," Eve went on. "I lost my temper — I had the best excuse — but I struck a woman who dared to cut me. There was a scene. Then all the people who were left at our

house turned against us and walked off the same day ——"

"Yet she says everything is my fault!" Dauntrey threw out his hands with a disclaiming gesture.

"Hold your tongue!" Eve shrilled at him, seeming to care no more than a wounded animal for the astonished stares of passers-by. It was only Dauntrey who made some poor attempt to cloak and screen the squalor of their quarrel. "What I say is true. Everything *is* your fault. Who gambled away the money I made, slaving in the house, taking boarders and trying to hold my head up? It was for your sake I worked; and now you refuse to do your part, yet you expect me to keep on loving you."

"Oh, don't, don't!" Mary pleaded. "I'll go with him, anywhere you want me to go."

Instantly Eve became calmer. "Will you do the thing if she stands by you?" she asked her husband.

"Yes," he answered, dully.

"Then for heaven's sake start at once, before you change your mind. "I'll wait for you here, on a seat. I must sit down or I shall drop."

"Wouldn't you rather go home if — if I ordered you a cab?" Mary suggested. "You will be so cold — so miserable — sitting out of doors in this sharp wind, with clouds of dust blowing."

"Home!" Eve repeated. "We haven't any home. We've had to leave the villa. We couldn't pay the rent. The beast of a landlord ordered us out. Nobody trusts anybody else at Monte Carlo. The tradespeople are after us like wolves. They've taken

everything we had worth taking, except the clothes on our backs. Now do you wonder I want him to get what he can out of the Casino? We must be off somewhere, to-night, before these brutes of tradesmen know we're away from the villa for good. They've probably nosed out something by this time."

"Come along, Miss Grant, if you're really willing to see me through this," Dauntrey said, clinging to those bare rocks of conventionality which still rose above the waters of despair.

"Unless," Eve broke in quickly, "you'd rather lend us enough to get us out of the whole scrape? Some day ——"

"Oh, cut that, Eve," her husband interposed. "I wouldn't take any more of Miss Grant's money even if she'd give it, for it would be giving, not lending."

"That depends on you. If you're so mean-spirited that you can't earn our living, I suppose we'll have to beg the rest of our lives, unless I go on the stage or something," said Eve. "You always do your best to crush every idea of mine."

"Just now I can't lay my hands on any money," Mary explained gently, anxious to keep the peace. "I was on my way ——" She was about to mention the jewellery she wished to sell, but Eve, too impatient to hear the excuses she expected, cut her short.

"Oh, well, the next best thing is to help Dauntrey squeeze as much as he can out of the Casino. Use your influence. I know he won't speak up for himself.

He's an English peer, when 'all's said and done! It would make a big scandal if he committed suicide because he'd lost everything in their beastly place. The papers all over the world would be full of it. The Casino wouldn't like that much. You can point it out."

Mary shivered and felt sick. She heard Lord Dauntrey mutter something under his breath, and saw him turn away. It was indescribably repulsive that his wife should speak in his presence of his possible suicide. The girl felt a sudden horror of Lady Dauntrey, yet she did not cease to pity her; and she was infinitely sorry for the cowed and wretched man whom she had always liked.

They started together for the Casino, Mary not yet understanding precisely what was to be done, but willing to give her services. For the moment her own troubles seemed small and easy to overcome, compared with the shipwreck of this miserable pair who had called themselves her friends.

XXXIV

Dauntrey walked with his head down, his hat pulled over his eyes and his hands in his pockets. Mary noticed that, though the wind was the coldest she had known at Monte Carlo, he wore no overcoat. She wondered if even that had been taken from him by the people to whom he owed money. Once he looked back lingeringly. "Eve must have gone to sit down," he said; and then, in shamed apology, "the poor girl is almost mad, and so am I. You mustn't think too much of what passed between us. We — we love each other, and come what may I believe we always will."

"I'm certain of that," Mary answered, in a warm voice which came from her heart.

They had walked on for a moment or two in silence, when Dauntrey asked abruptly: "Do you know what you're letting yourself in for?"

"Not quite," Mary admitted. "But whatever it is, I don't think I shall much mind if I can help you."

"I believe you really can help," he assured her. "I'm going to apply for what's called the *viatique*. It's a sum of money the Casino people grant to — to us broken gamblers, if we can prove that we've lost a lot. It's a way of getting rid of us, without

too much trouble to themselves or — as my wife said — danger of scandal. They'll give a ticket second class, to take you home if you're dead broke, even if your home's as far off as Bombay, and enough money to pay for your food on the journey. It's very decent of them — generous, considering they don't ask you to come here and gamble, and that they always play fair. But a railway ticket and a few louis in my pocket are no good in my case. I've Eve to think of — and some sort of a future, God help me! She hopes because I happen to have a title which used to be of some importance I may bluff them into giving me a good lump sum. I'm afraid there isn't much in that. Nobody ever heard of their offering more than two thousand francs, so far as I know, and that was exceptional, a classic sort of case. But it may be they'll be influenced by you. Every one knows you're going to marry the Duke di Rienzi's son. And you've been rather a famous gambler. You're of some importance. Heaven knows I'm not! If I get something worth what I have to go through, you'll be the one to thank — to say nothing of the moral support. I've gone to pieces so the last few days, I doubt if I could have faced this alone."

They came to the Casino, and Mary was challenged by one of the doorkeepers because of her bag. He reminded her politely that no one was allowed to go in with a parcel of any description. "Ever since a lady tried to blow us all up with a bomb in a paper package," he added, smiling.

"I'll leave my bag in the *vestiaire*," Mary promised; and being well known she was allowed to pass.

The attendant in whose care she indifferently placed the locked jewel-case had no idea that he guarded valuables worth two thousand pounds or more. The hand-bag had a modest air of containing a few pretty trifles for a toilet in a motor car.

Mary's heart had begun to beat fast, for Lord Dauntrey's face was so pale and rigid that she realized his dread of an ordeal and began to share it. It was many days since she had entered the Casino. The atrium, once so familiar, almost dear to her eyes, looked strange. It was odd to find there the same faces she had often seen before. She felt as if years had passed since she was one of those who eagerly frequented this place. What if Vanno could see her now? she thought. He would not like to have her come to the Casino with Lord Dauntrey, yet if she could make him understand all, she told herself that he would not be angry. Angelo might be, and even unforgiving, but not Vanno.

"Where must we go to ask for the *viatique?*" she inquired of Dauntrey in a low voice, looking anxiously at the different closed doors, behind which any mystery might hide, for few ever saw them open.

"We have to go through the Salle Schmidt," he answered doggedly.

That seemed worse than she had thought, but she said nothing. She found herself suddenly missing Hannaford, and wishing that his calm face with its black bandage might appear among all these faces

that meant nothing to her. If he were here he would stand by them, or perhaps go alone with Lord Dauntrey in order to spare her. He had always tried to save her from everything disagreeable, from the very beginning of their friendship until its end.

The mellow golden light in the great gaming room, and the somnolent musky scent which she had called the "smell of money," seized upon Mary's imagination with renewed vividness, even as on the first night when as a stranger she timidly yet eagerly entered the Casino. She felt again the powerful influence of the place, but in a different way. The pleasant, kindly animal to which she had likened the Casino was now a mighty monster, who must be approached with caution and even fear, whose gentle, feline purring was the purr of a tiger sitting with claws in sheath. How the great golden beast could strike and tear sometimes, the desperate face of her companion told. Mary feared for his sake that people might read the lines of misery, and whisper that here was one of Monte Carlo's wrecks.

She had often noticed in the gilded Salle Schmidt those four long mirrors in the corners, which could only be known as doors when some inspector or other functionary pressed his foot on a trigger level with the floor in front of one of them. When this was done, a mirror would instantly move so promptly that Mary had named those doors the "open sesames."

Now, when she had walked with Dauntrey to the farthest door on the right-hand side of the room, he

stopped. Near by stood two blue-coated, gold-braided Casino footmen, as if keeping guard; and suddenly Mary remembered that these or other footmen were always hovering at that spot. Often, too, she had seen shamed and sad-looking men and women sitting dejectedly on the leather cushioned seat by the side of the door. She had never thought about them particularly, but in this moment of enlightenment she guessed why they haunted this corner, like starved birds waiting in the hope of crumbs. She was thankful to see that the seat was deserted. It would have been terrible to be one of those who had to wait while everybody who knew the secret of the door passed by and saw, and stared curiously or pityingly. She began to understand how it was that Eve's shattered nerves had forbidden her to come and "stand by" Lord Dauntrey.

Leaving the girl a pace or two behind, he squared his shoulders and went up to the footmen. Mary could not hear what he said, but the Casino servant's answer was distinctly audible. It was politely spoken, yet there was, or seemed to be, in the man's manner a slight indifference, and even disdain, which would not have been there in addressing a successful, not a broken, gambler.

"Monsieur is engaged at present, but will be free in a few moments," she heard.

Dauntrey came quickly back to her, as to a refuge. The eyes of both footmen rested upon her for an instant. They were almost, but not quite, expressionless. Under control yet visible was surprise

and animal curiosity. The men knew Miss Grant by sight and reputation as "one of the lucky ones," and she felt that they were wondering if she too had lost all, and come whining to the "management" for a *viatique*.

"For heaven's sake let's stand out of the way," Dauntrey whispered, "so every one won't know what we're after." They moved to a little distance, and Lord Dauntrey began trying to make conversation, but could think of nothing to say. Long pauses fell. Both tried not to look at the mirror door, but their eyes were drawn there, as if by an unseen power behind it. They could see themselves and each other in the glass. Mary thought that no one could help noticing how anxious and strained were their faces.

After some moments, which seemed long, the door opened without sound and a woman appeared. She hung her head, and her face was concealed with a veil such as Princess Della Robbia had worn when she came to Rose Winter's flat. A footman with a yellow paper in his hand preceded the drooping figure, steering toward the outer door of the Salle Schmidt, as if going to the atrium. He had a peculiarly stolid air, as if performing a business duty to which he was so used that he could do it very well while other matters engaged his thoughts.

"*She's* got something, anyhow," mumbled Lord Dauntrey, in a sickly voice. "Come along, please. It's our turn now."

He identified Mary with his own interests, as if they were intimately hers. Politely, or perhaps in

cowardice, he stood aside to let her go before him. Immediately and without noise the door was closed behind them.

Mary's hands were cold. A little pulse was beating in her throat, and its throbbing made her feel slightly sick. She looked up, wide-eyed, into the face of a man who had dismissed the veiled woman, and stood waiting to receive them.

He was spare, elderly, black-coated, almost absurdly respectable looking, with his gray beard and mild gaze behind gold-rimmed pince-nez. The small bare room with its plain desk and two or three chairs made a bleak background for the neat figure of the man. The austerity of the closet-like enclosure, in contrast with the magnificence outside, seemed meant as a warning to let petitions be brief, to the point, and above all strictly within the bounds of reason.

"What do you wish me to do for you?" As he asked this question, with cool civility, the benevolent yet cautious eyes peered through their glass screen at Mary; and the thought sprang into her mind that this elderly man of commonplace appearance had perhaps listened to more harrowing stories of human misery and ruin than any other person in the world. Even the most popular father confessor of the church could scarcely have heard as many agonizing appeals. He must be able to discriminate between truth and falsehood, to read faces and judge voices, for no doubt, as Mary guessed, people must often come to him swearing they had

lost many thousands of francs, when in reality their losses amounted only to a few hundreds.

Dauntrey, whose hand was unsteady, held out his season card of admission to the Casino. "I suppose you know who I am," he said.

The man in the black coat looked at the name on the card, and inclined his head slightly as if in affirmation.

"I've lost all I had in the world," Dauntrey went on in a dead voice, "and all my wife had. I've been here since the beginning of December and had the most cursed luck. I — Miss Grant will bear me out. She was staying at our house. You've seen her before no doubt. One of your lucky ones. You — you'll have to do something decent for me. Unfortunately I've got into debt — my rent — and tradesmen. No good having a scandal. You've had a lot out of me — close on ten thousand pounds. You can afford to give me back 10 per cent., can't you?"

The official's face hardened. He looked a man who could be obdurate as well as benevolent. "I regret," he replied in English, "that it is impossible to give any such sum. Nothing like it has ever been granted, not even to those who have lost great fortunes. If the Casino made such presents it would cease to exist. And I cannot help thinking that my lord in excitement exaggerates his losses. I have heard that he has lost not more than four thousand pounds, and that three fourths of that sum belonged to his friends, for whom he kindly played. In my lord's case, two first-class tickets to London ——"

"Of no use whatever," Dauntrey broke in sharply. "What would you have me do when my wife and I get to England without a penny?"

"After all, that is your lordship's affair."

Dauntrey's face crimsoned, and the veins stood out in his temples. Then the red faded, leaving him yellow pale.

"It will be your affair if I kill myself here, as I shall be driven to do if you won't help me. My name will cause some little sensation after I'm dead, if it never made any stir while I lived."

"Couldn't the Casino spare Lord Dauntrey five hundred pounds, at least?" Mary begged, stumbling to the rescue. "It would be so dreadful for everybody concerned if — if — anything happened."

"The administration cannot allow itself to be threatened," its mouthpiece answered.

"My threat isn't an empty one," Dauntrey persisted. "You leave only one exit open for me."

"I am sorry, but I have no authority to grant large sums to any one, on any pretext." The tone was firm, but something in the eyes encouraged Mary to persevere. She pleaded as nothing imaginable could have induced her to plead for herself, and at last the man with the pince-nez promised to "recommend the administration" to give his lordship two thousand francs. Dauntrey was provided with a bit of yellow paper, such as Mary had seen in the hand of the veiled woman. This, he was told, must be presented upstairs, and in the morning Dauntrey would receive the gift, or "loan," of two thousand francs.

Mary had expected him to be bitterly disappointed, but when she had secured her hand-bag and they were leaving the Casino together, he seemed comparatively cheerful. "With this money I may win everything back at baccarat in Nice," he said, "if Eve doesn't object. We've got to go somewhere. Why not there? And if I lose, things won't be any worse with us than they are now. What use is two thousand francs except to gamble with? Still, I didn't think they'd give me as much, and they wouldn't, by half, if it hadn't been for you."

"I hope Lady Dauntrey won't be disappointed," Mary ventured.

"I don't know — I don't know," he muttered. "Eve is in a strange state of mind. It makes me anxious for the future. But what's the good of worrying? Perhaps there won't be any future."

Lady Dauntrey was sitting on an iron seat near the top of the gardens. She sprang up when the lamplight showed her the two figures she knew, walking side by side.

"Well?" she asked breathlessly.

"Two thousand francs — thanks to Miss Grant," her husband answered; and Mary was afraid of an angry outburst, but it did not come.

"Two thousand francs!" Eve echoed, dully. "Better than nothing. But what's to become of us? Where shall we go? If we buy tickets even second class for England, there's a lot gone. If only we could get away to some place near by and hide ourselves for a while, till we could have time to look

round and make up our minds!" She turned quickly to Mary. "While you were both gone," she said, "I was thinking. It's true, isn't it, that Captain Hannaford left the château he bought to you?"

"Yes," Mary admitted.

"I was wondering if you'd let us live in it for a few days — or a few weeks."

"I'm going there myself to-night," Mary said impulsively. Then a curious sensation gripped her, as if she were caught by a wave and swept onward, in spite of herself, toward something which she feared and even hated. She wished intensely that Lady Dauntrey had not mentioned the Château Lontana, and that it had been possible to be silent about her own plans. She had spoken without stopping to think; but even now that she did think, she could not see how silence would have been easy. It seemed that unless she were willing to be hard and ungenerous to this unhappy man and woman she could not avoid offering them shelter for a few days. Quickly she told herself that she must give them money in addition to the *viatique* which Lord Dauntrey would receive in cash to-morrow. If he still refused to accept anything more from her, Lady Dauntrey would need no persuasion. Mary was instinctively sure of this. And she thought that when the husband and wife were in possession of a few hundred pounds they would be only too glad to leave the gloomy Château Lontana and go to England or somewhere else, to recover themselves.

While she hesitated, feeling compelled to invite the Dauntreys, yet facing the necessity with almost exaggerated reluctance, Eve saved her the responsibility of deciding. "Won't you take us with you?" she asked humbly. "It seems — providential — for us that you're going. So strange, too, that it should be to-night; and so queer the idea coming into my head. Just as if it was meant to be!"

Now the matter had passed beyond control, Mary had the impulse to rebel. The wave had got her and was bearing her along. She tried to catch at safety.

"But — Lord Dauntrey must stay in Monte Carlo — till to-morrow. And I have to go to-night," she stammered. "I don't quite see ——"

"You're going alone?" Eve asked.

"Yes."

"How queer of the Princess Della Robbia to let you do that!"

"She doesn't know." The girl defended Marie.

"Doesn't know where you're going?"

"No." Mary felt obliged to explain. "I was — vexed at something that happened to-day. So I — finished my visit sooner than I expected."

"Oh! And does your friend Mrs. Winter approve?"

"She doesn't know, either. She's at Nice for the day, with her husband."

"Surely somebody must know what you're doing. Your own Prince Vanno?"

Mary shrank a little from the familiar name on

lips that had no right to it; yet she answered gently: "Even he doesn't know. He's in Rome; but perhaps you've heard. It was in the paper, Marie — Princess Della Robbia told me. I shall write to him, of course."

"Of course. Meanwhile, you seem to be — sneaking off the stage when nobody's looking." Lady Dauntrey laughed a staccato laugh at her own rather lumbering joke.

"Nobody but you and Lord Dauntrey, as it happens."

"Well," Eve began to speak slowly, as if on reflection, "I'm sure you must have some wise reason for what you're doing, dear; but whatever it is, I can't help thinking it will be a very good thing for you to have us with you. You're too young and pretty to be running about by yourself, and going to stay in lonesome villas. There are servants at the Château Lontana who expect you, anyhow, I suppose?"

"Only a caretaker Captain Hannaford put in. I haven't had time to let her know."

"Dear me, you are casual! The place is near Ventimiglia, isn't it? I've never seen it."

"I've only passed, motoring to Bordighera. It's not very far beyond the frontier."

"Good! That simplifies matters. Dauntrey can easily run back to Monte to-morrow and get his money. When are you starting, dear?"

"I must find out about trains. And before I leave, I have to go to the Galerie Charles Trois and

get a jeweller there to take back one or two pieces of jewellery, for I must have some money. When I — decided to start this evening, the bank was already shut."

Lady Dauntrey darted a sudden glance of interest at the bag in Mary's hand, which she had been too preoccupied to notice until now. Her guest had kept most of the much talked of jewels at the bank, while staying at the Villa Bella Vista, but it was not difficult to guess that at present they were in their owner's hand.

"You won't get nearly what the things are worth," she said. "A pity to sell just because you were too late to cash a cheque! I've got a hundred francs. Why not let us all three go to Italy with that, and Dauntrey can finance you with the Casino money till you get some from your bank? He can take over a cheque of yours. That would save time, you know — for it's late already."

"Very well," Mary agreed. A heavy sense of depression had fallen upon her. The eager anxiety she had felt to reach the end of her journey and write to Vanno died down like a fire quenched by water.

"You didn't tell me that you had a hundred francs," Dauntrey reproached his wife.

"No," she replied. "And I wouldn't have told you now, if you weren't obliged to keep out of the Casino."

He turned his head aside, and was silent.

"Aren't you taking luggage?" Lady Dauntrey inquired of Mary.

"Yes. I have a small trunk and a hand-bag with me."

"Where are they?"

"In the room of the concierge at Mrs. Winter's."

"Let me think a minute," said Eve. "Why should we wait for a train? There's sure not to be one when we want it. We have no luggage, and you say your trunk is small. We might hire a carriage and drive. It would be much pleasanter. Perhaps you can lend me a few things for to-night?"

"Of course," Mary answered, trying to be cordial.

"How good you are to us!" Eve exclaimed. "We can never be grateful enough. Dauntrey, will you go on to the railway station and order a commissionnaire to fetch Mary's things from the Winters' house? He can bring them back to the station in his cart."

"Why shouldn't we pick the things up on our way, if we're to have a carriage?" her husband argued.

"Because my plan's the best," she insisted. "We must eat before we start. There won't be much food in the villa, as Mary's paying a surprise visit. We'll go to a little hotel by the station. I'm frozen, and food will do us all good. By the time we're ready to start the man will have brought the luggage."

"It sounds unnecessarily complicated," Dauntrey muttered; but Eve gave him a gimlet look from under level brows, and he slouched away obediently, leaving his wife to follow slowly with the girl.

XXXV

THE last familiar face Mary saw as she left Monte Carlo was that of the hunchbacked dwarf at St. Roman. He was hobbling away from his pitch to go home, and from the window of the closed landau Mary waved a hand to him as the horses trotted by.

"Who was that?" Eve asked, leaning forward, then throwing herself back as if she wished not to be seen.

"Only the dwarf beggar at the bridge," Mary answered.

"Oh, only a beggar!" Lady Dauntrey settled herself comfortably again.

The voice of the waves came up with the wind in a ceaseless moan, and for the first time Mary hated the sound of the sea. It was like the wailing of a great company of mourning women. Far above the road, Roquebrune clock struck seven. It was scarcely night, but darkness loomed ahead like a black wall, toward which the horses hurried yet could never pass. In this wall glittered square peepholes of light, which were windows of houses at Cap Martin — Angelo's house among others. When with a turn of the road the bright spots vanished, Mary was overwhelmed with homesickness, such pangs as children suffer. She did not wish to be in

the Villa Mirasole, but leaving it behind in the darkness and travelling toward the unknown made her feel that she was shut out in the night alone, far from Vanno, far from all that could remind her of him.

"Remember eternal!" She thought with a superstitious pang of the tablet and of the parted lovers.

Marie had "seen pigeons," and said that they meant sorrow and separation. The girl had written of this to Vanno, only a few hours ago, in a spirit of laughter, but she had been young and happy then. Now she felt deserted and old. She was not glad to have the Dauntreys with her. She would rather have been going alone to the Château Lontana. Eve's figure sitting beside her, Lord Dauntrey's opposite, with his back to the horses, looked black against blackness. They spoke seldom and they were like dreams of the night, which had taken life. Mary remembered how she had dreamed of Eve, and how glad she had been to wake. But now she was awake and Eve was by her side. It was like a garden game the big girls had made her play when she was the youngest child in the convent-school. They had wound long, thick strings round her waist and ankles; then they had made her run, and when she had gone a certain distance they drew her back, slowly and firmly, or with violence, according to their mood. This had been a torture to the imaginative little girl, and Sister Marie-des-Anges, seeing it one day, ordered the older children to stop, and the game had been forbidden. This benevolent edict

had given Mary a warm sense of being protected; but there was no one to protect her now.

If the girl had been happy, she could have laughed at these memories, coming up in connection with the two silent, dark figures of the man and woman she was to shelter in her house; but in her perplexity their presence made the desolation of the night more desolate.

Mentone streets were empty and the shops shut: only hotel and villa windows were bright. The carriage passed through the town, and beyond the last houses of Garavan the night was blacker than before.

They came to the Italian frontier, broken off from the rich slopes of France by the deep Gorge of St. Louis, resonant with singing water. Mary knew how by daylight the mountains of Italy loomed cold in contrast to the warm cultivation of the western hills, bare as a series of stone shelves at an antiquary's, spread with a few rags of faded green to show off some sparsely scattered jewels. But in the night she could see nothing, and could hear only the moan of sea and wind, mingled strangely with the high complaining voice of hidden streams. On the mountainside twinkled the feeble lights of Grimaldi, a poor rock-town once the fortress house of Monaco's princes; and after another plunge into the darkness of folding hills and olive groves they passed La Mortola. Not more than a mile or two beyond the village and the sleeping garden, Mary, with her face always at the window, said:

"Now we are coming to the Château Lontana!"

Eve and her husband both leaned forward, straining their eyes to make out a height rising above the road, and the black shape of a house with towers which seemed cut in the purple curtain of the sky. There were black nunlike forms of cypress trees also, which stood grouped together as if looking down thoughtfully from their tall slopes, and old, wide-branching olives were filmy as a gray cloud in the darkness.

The Monte Carlo coachman evidently knew the place, for he slowed down without being asked, and stopped in front of a large double gate of iron between glimmering columns of pale stone. This was the entrance from the road; but an avenue ran steeply up the rocky slope, twisting in zigzags to reach the house. Jumping down from his box the man tried the gates, expecting to find them locked, but they yielded to a stout push, and a moment later he drove in. The horses, tired from breasting the wind on many hills, went up the incline slowly, the wheels grating over small stones on the ill-kept drive. Mary thought the noise of hoofs and wheels so sharp and unmistakable that she looked to see some eye of light suddenly open in the black face of the house. It was not yet nine o'clock, and the caretaker could hardly have gone to bed. But there was no sign of life; and the dark château among crowding trees might have stood in silence and desolation for a century of sleep, like the lost palace of the enchanted beauty.

A flight of marble steps went up to a colonnaded terrace, and Lord Dauntrey mounted first to ring the bell.

"Perhaps the caretaker has given herself a holiday, and we can't get in after all," he gloomily suggested. His wife did not answer; but Mary, sitting beside the silent woman, heard her breathing fast. This betrayal of anxiety seemed tragic. "Poor Lady Dauntrey!" the girl said to herself in pity. "Here is her one hope of shelter. She's afraid it may fail." And Mary tried to be glad that whatever happened it was in her power to help the unlucky couple.

The carriage lights gilded the marble stairs, showing cracks and a green, mossy growth under each shallow step. There was a heavy fragrance of datura flowers, sickly sweet, that mingled with a scent of moss and mouldy, unkempt growing things, touching the imagination like the perfume of sad memories.

Lord Dauntrey rang again and again the old-fashioned bell whose insistent voice could be heard jangling through the house. At last, when he had rung four times, a wavering light suddenly streaked with yellow the glass crescent above the door. There was a noise of a chair falling, a bolt slipping back, a key turning rustily; and through these sounds of life the shrill yap, yap of a little dog cut like sharp crackings of a whip. The door opened a few inches, and the yellow light haloed a dark head.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice called out in bad Italian, through the shrill bursts of barking.

Lord Dauntrey could neither speak nor understand Italian; but already Mary was halfway up the steps. "It is the Signorina Grant, of whom you have heard," she explained. "You know from the lawyer that Captain Hannaford has given his place to me?"

"Ah, the Signorina at last!" exclaimed the voice, with an accent of joy. "Be thou still, little ten times devil!" The door opened wide, and a gust of wind would have blown out the flame of the lamp in the woman's hand had she not hastily stepped back into the shelter of a vestibule, at the same time squeezing the miniature wolf-hound under her arm, so that its yap was crushed into a stricken rumble.

Lady Dauntrey now began to ascend the steps, and the coachman, anxious to get home, alertly dismounted the two pieces of baggage. He brought the small trunk and big dressing-bag up to the door, plumping them down on the marble floor of the terrace so noisily that the dog again convulsed itself with rage. The price the man asked was paid without haggling; he and Lord Dauntrey between them dragged Mary's possessions into the vestibule, and the door was shut. As the girl heard the sounds of hoofs trotting gayly away, she would have given much to call after the driver, to spring into the carriage and let herself be taken anywhere, if only she need not stay with the Dauntreys and the yapping dog in this desolate house, which was a dead man's gift to her.

Her spirits faintly revived when the lamplight had shown her the richly coloured dark face of the woman

with the dog. It was a young face, though too full and heavy chinned to be girlish: and from under an untidy crown of black hair two great yellow-brown eyes, faithful and lustrous as a spaniel's, gazed with eager curiosity at the Signorina. If the caretaker of the Château Lontana had been old and forbidding Mary's cup of misery would have overflowed, but the pleased smile of this red-lipped, full-bosomed, healthy creature gave light and warmth to the house.

"Welcome, Signorina," she said in the guttural Italian of one accustomed to a *patois*. "It has been very lonely here since the poor Captain ceased to come. The lawyer from Ventimiglia said perhaps the new mistress would arrive and surprise me one day, but the time seemed long, alone with the dog. Will the Signorina and her friends come in? Think nothing of the baggage. I am strong and can carry it without help. What a pity I did not know of the good fortune this night would bring! There is nothing to eat but a little black bread, cheese, and lettuce with oil: to drink, only coffee or some rough red wine of the country, and fires nowhere except in the kitchen. But I have pleased myself by keeping the best rooms prepared as well as I could. Fires are laid in three of the fireplaces, and three beds can be ready when a warming pan full of hot embers has been passed between the sheets. It was the poor, good Captain himself who told me to be prepared. He too seemed to think that the Signorina might come with friends, and talked to me of it the last day he was here."

As the woman rambled on, she led the way into a large hall opening out from the vestibule. In the dim light cast by her lamp the high ceilinged, white-walled, sparsely furnished space was dreary as a snow-cave, and as cold; but Mary could see that by day there might be possibilities of stately charm. She forced herself to praise the hall in order to please the caretaker, whose eyes begged some word of admiration.

"Oh, there are many beautiful rooms, Signorina," the Italian woman said. "In sunlight they are lovely. To-morrow, if the Signorina permits, I will show her all over the house, and tell her what things the Captain liked best. But night is the bad time here. I do not know how I should get on were it not for my dog, which the Captain allowed me to bring down from my home in the mountains."

"Ask her if she speaks or understands French," said Eve.

Mary obeyed.

"Ah, Signorina, unfortunately I have but little French. It was all I could do to learn Italian well. With us up there, we have a *patois*, but the curé of our village makes the children study Italian. Afterward we are glad. Such French as we have, we pick up later by ourselves."

"Where is your village?" Mary inquired.

"Very far away, Signorina, and very high up, where the snows lie always in winter. It is a town built on a rock where in oldest days once stood a temple of Baal. Our houses are very ancient, and

they stand back to back like soldiers fighting. The Signorina cannot conceive how wild we are there. And the dogs are wild, too. They often run away from the village when they are young and go to live with the wolves, farther up the mountain. Then they regret sometimes; and when the smell of cooking mounts on the wind, the poor animals creep down as far as they dare, to sit on a ridge of rock where they can see people moving below. But they can never come back, for the wolves would be angry and run after, to kill them in revenge. Look at my dog, how like a baby wolf he is. All our dogs are born with the faces of wolves. I have an aunt at home who is a witch. The whole village fears her, for she curses those she hates, and works wicked spells. Me she hates worst of all because I refused to live in her house when I was young. I had to run away at last with my dog, or she would have murdered me, in spite of the curé. He sent me to a woman he knew, who had been cook in this house. When I came she had died, and the place was already sold. But I met the Captain and he engaged me to be caretaker."

"He told me," Mary said, "that your name was Apollonia, and that you were honest and good."

"He spoke to me of the Signorina, too," answered the young woman. "He described her as very beautiful, like a saint or an angel, with kind, sweet eyes, and hair like the sun in a mist. That is why, when I saw the Signorina to-night, I knew she must be the right one. If it had been the other lady who came

first to the house, I should not have believed she was the Captain's Signorina. It is very strange, but her eyes are the eyes of my aunt who is the witch. I hope the Signorina will not be offended with me for saying this of her friend, for I can not help remarking it. My aunt is not old, though older than that Signora. And she is handsome; but of course the Signora is much handsomer and grander than a poor peasant woman."

"I think," said Mary, willing to change the subject, "that we had better see our rooms, and have the fires lighted. Give my friends the best there is — two rooms adjoining, and I will take what is left. We shall stay with you a few days — perhaps more. We can't settle our plans quite yet."

"The longer, the better for me, Signorina," Apollonia replied. She smiled at her new mistress; but when her look turned to Lady Dauntrey she secretly "made horns" with the first and last fingers of the hand that held the dog; the sign which Italians and Arabs use to keep off the evil eye.

She opened doors, holding her smoky lamp high, and with the air of a hospitable queen (such as most Italian peasant women have), she showed to the Signorina the splendours of her domain. They were, to be sure, but tarnished and dilapidated splendours, nevertheless Mary began to understand even in the gloom of night how these great rooms, peopled now with shadows, had appealed to Hannaford. She could guess what the view from windows and garden must be like, and had she come to the house in hap-

pier circumstances she would have looked forward to seeing everything in morning sunshine. As it was, she wished for one thing only: for the moment when she could be alone, to think, and write her letter to Vanno.

Mary and her guests refused food but accepted coffee, made quickly and well by Apollonia. They drank from cracked or chipped but beautiful cups of old Sèvres, and shivered in an immense Empire dining-room, while Apollonia lighted fires and warmed beds in the "best rooms" upstairs, which they had not yet mustered courage to visit. Lady Dauntrey became more cheerful over the hot coffee, and atoned to her husband for past taunts and reproaches by a manner of almost deprecating affection. Mary had never seen her so soft and sweet. She was a different woman, and even her expression was changed. The girl could not help remembering what Apollonia had said about the "witch-eyes"; but she thought the Italian would not have found a likeness to the terrible aunt could she now have seen Lady Dauntrey for the first time. Mary was glad of the change for Lord Dauntrey's sake, because, though he was weak, perhaps unworthy, she pitied him with a pity akin to pain.

When Apollonia came back to say that all was ready for the night, the three followed her up the wide and beautifully designed marble staircase which led to the first and second stories.

There was no question of choice in apportioning the three "best rooms," prepared for occupation,

because two adjoined each other, with a door between; and these suggested themselves naturally for Lord and Lady Dauntrey. The third and smaller room was at a distance, and had only one door, which opened to the hall; but there was a great French window leading to a balcony and evidently looking southward, over the slopes of the garden down to the sea.

"This was the room the poor Captain loved," Apollonia announced; "therefore it is right the Signorina should have it for her own. He hoped she might choose it, I know. Sometimes he spent a night here, toward the last. Perhaps he can see the Signorina at this moment, and if he can, I am sure he is very happy."

Had there been a possibility of changing from that room to any other in the house, even the worst and meanest, Mary would have changed gladly; but she could not take one of the rooms she had given the Dauntreys; and to order another got ready would have seemed heartless to Apollonia, whose quick intuition would have told her the reason.

Mary resigned herself to sleep in the room where Hannaford had thought and dreamed of her.

When they had bidden their hostess good-night, and their doors were locked, Lord and Lady Dauntrey stood together for a moment at one of the long windows of the larger room. This Eve had taken, and on the bed with the high, carved walnut back lay the night-dress borrowed from Mary. Through

torn clouds a few stars glittered like coins in a gashed purse, and very far away to the west, at the end of all things visible, was a faint, ghostly gleam which meant the dazzling lights of the Casino and its terrace, at Monte Carlo.

Lady Dauntrey rested against her husband's shoulder, as if his companionship were dear and essential to her. She had done this often before their marriage and shortly after; but not once for many months now. It seemed to him that he could remember every one of the caresses which had bound him to her as with ropes from which he could not, and did not desire to, escape. A long time ago in South Africa, when she had first made him love her, she had been pleased when he called her his "beautiful tigress." She had kissed him for the name, and said that of all animals she adored tigers; that she believed she had been a tigress once; and when they were rich — as they would be some time — he must buy her a splendid tiger skin to lie on. This very day the tigress thought of her had been in his heart, but not as a loving fancy. She had seemed to him cruel and terrible as a hungry animal despising her mate because he fails to bring her prey as food. He had said to himself in shame and desolation of soul that she had never cared for him really, but only for what he might give; and because he had disappointed her, giving little, she hated and would perhaps leave him, to better herself. Now the touch of her shoulder against his breast, and the tired, childlike tucking of her head into his neck, warmed

his blood that had run sluggishly and cold as the blood of a prisoner in a cell. New courage flowed back to his heart. Vague thoughts of suicide flapped away like night-birds with the coming of light. If Eve cared for him still he had the incentive to live.

"That place seems to haunt us," she murmured, as they stood together in seeming love and need of one another. He knew what she meant. Their eyes were on the distant glimmer of Monte Carlo. "Its influence follows us."

"From here the lights look pure white, like the lights of some mysterious paradise, seen far off across the sea," Dauntrey said.

"No," his wife answered; "to me they're more like the light that comes out of graves at night time; the strange, phosphorescent light of decayed, dead things. We've done with that lure light forever, haven't we?"

"I suppose so!" A sigh of yearning and regret heaved his breast, under the nestling head. "If you're going to be kind to me again, Eve, I can do anything and go anywhere."

"Good!" she said in the soft, purring tone which had made him think of her as a beautiful tigress, when their life together lay before them. "I *will* be kind, very kind, if only you'll prove that you really love me. You never have proved it yet."

"Haven't I? I thought I had, often — to-day, even ——"

"Oh! don't let's go back to that. I can't bear

to think of it. We weren't ourselves — either of us. If I was cross, forgive me, dear."

"I deserved it all," he said, pressing her against his side. "Now you're making me a man again."

"You must be a man — a strong man — if you want me to love you as I once did, and as I *can* love. Oh, and I can — I can love! You don't know yet how much."

"What shall I have to do?" he asked. "Do you mean anything in particular, or ——"

"Yes, I mean something in particular."

"I'll do it, darling, whatever it may be. I feel the strength."

She wrapped him in her arms and clung to him, talking softly, with her lips against his hollowed cheek, so that her breath fluttered softly past it with each half-whispered word.

"That's a promise," she said. "I won't let you break it. But you won't want to break it. I'll love you so much — enough to make up for everything. Enough to keep you from remembering those lights over there."

"They're nothing to me," he assured her. "I don't believe I'll ever want to see them again. There are other places where I can do better than at Monte Carlo. Baccarat's a safer game than roulette or trente et quarante, I begin to think, and I could adapt the system ——"

"Never mind the system now! You'll have to go back to Monte to-morrow to get your eighty pounds, and a cheque cashed for Mary Grant — a

big one, I hope. Then you can redeem some of our things. One trunk for each of us will be enough, for I want to go a long way off and travel quickly."

"Where do you want to go?" Dauntrey asked, indulgently, in a dreaming voice, as if her love and the force of her fierce vitality were hypnotizing him. He spoke as if he were so near happiness again that he would gladly go anywhere, to find it once more with Eve.

"I haven't made up my mind about that yet."

"Oh, I thought you had! You always make up your mind so quickly when you want anything."

"I've been putting my mind to what we must do first, before we go away. There *is* a thing to do; and it will have to be done soon, or it will be too late."

Her tone was suddenly sharp as a knife rubbed against steel.

"What thing?" her husband asked, startled out of his dream.

Instantly she softened again and clung to him and round him more closely than before. "Darling," she said, "you've just told me that you'd do anything for my sake."

"So I would. So I will."

"Sometimes men are ready to do anything except the one thing the women who love them ask them to do."

"It won't be like that with me, Eve. Try me and see."

"I will. I want you to go with me far, far away, where we've never been before, to make a new life,

and belong only to each other. But before we go, so that we can be happy and not wretched, miserable beggars, we — not you alone — but we two together must do what will give us money to start all over again. And listen to this, dearest: it will be a thing which will draw us so closely together that we'll be one in body and soul forever and ever, in this world and the next."

"You almost frighten me," Dauntrey said.

"Don't be frightened," she implored, her mouth close to his. "If you're frightened, you'll fail me — and then it's all over between us."

"All over between us!"

"Yes, because if you fail, you break your solemn promise, and you're not the man I thought you were — not the man I can love. I'll go out of your life and find some one who is stronger, because I've got too much love in me to waste."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To find a plan, at once — to-morrow, after you come back — for us to get Mary Grant's jewels and all the money you bring to her from Monte Carlo, and then to go safely away — together, where we can be happy."

"Good God!" He broke loose from her clinging arms, and pushed her off. "You want me to murder the girl!"

They faced one another in the dreary glimmer of the two candles. For an instant neither spoke, but each could hear the other breathing in the semi-darkness.

"What a horrible thought!" Eve flung herself upon him again and caught his hands, which had been hot as they clasped hers but had suddenly grown cold, as a stone is chilled when the sun leaves it in shadow. He did not snatch his hands away, but they gave no answering pressure. He bowed his head like a man who is very tired, having come to the end of his strength.

"Have we sunk to this?" he groaned under his breath, yet Eve caught the words.

"Wait! You've misunderstood me," she reassured him eagerly. "I don't want you to — take her life. Only — we must have money, and those jewels of hers — she doesn't need them. We do. And we're *meant* to have them, else why should we have been thrown in her way just at the right moment? Why should we be now in this lonely house, no one knowing that we're here? It's Destiny. I saw that when she spoke about the jewel-case. Didn't you guess what was in my mind?"

"I was past guessing," Dauntrey said. "I had enough to think of without putting problems to myself."

"It's lucky my brain kept awake. That was why I proposed driving here instead of coming by train, where somebody might have seen us: that was why I wouldn't call for the luggage at Mrs. Winter's."

"Do you dream for a moment that if — if there were any inquiry the police wouldn't be able find out we were in this thing?" Dauntrey asked in bitter impatience. "How like a woman!"

"I'm not so simple. If we're clever, there won't be an inquiry. And even if there were any accident, we should be all right. There'd be nothing against us. And we'd be out of the way before the fuss began. They couldn't even get at us as witnesses."

"What's in your mind? You talk as if you had some definite plan."

"I have. But it depends on you. Surely with all your knowledge, you know a drug that can temporarily weaken a person's will? There must be something that girl could take which would make her willing to follow our suggestions? She's in such a nervous condition, a sudden illness would seem quite natural. Once she was in the right state, I could persuade her to give us her jewels and some cheque. Then we wouldn't let the grass grow under our feet. We'd be off — and in no danger."

"There's no drug of that sort," said Dauntrey.

"I don't believe you. Oh, say there is! I don't know what I may be driven to do, with my own hands, if you refuse to help me."

"I tell you there's no such thing — that isn't dangerous to life."

She caught at this admission. "What is the thing in your mind?" she whispered tensely.

"A plant that grows in this garden," he admitted sullenly. "You must have smelt the perfume when we drove in."

"Datura! I remember. The Kaffirs make a decoction of it in South Africa. They think it's a love potion."

"Yes, that's what I mean. There are two ways of using it. One way it's a deadly poison. The other makes those who take the stuff stupid. But even so it's dangerous. I've seen one or two victims of that experiment who didn't come back to their senses, but remained dull and melancholy, caring for nothing and nobody."

"That's a risk we must run," said Eve, with the briskness of hope and a decision arrived at. "It's simply providential!"

"Good Lord, what a word to use!"

"It slipped out. I suppose, after all, I'm conventional. Providence and destiny are the same. Think how everything has worked up to this. Even the datura in the garden!"

"It can stay there!" Dauntrey blurted out, savagely.

With a hand on each of his shoulders, she held herself off from her husband at arm's length, looking him straight in the eyes with her level, compelling gaze.

"I swear to you," she said slowly, giving each word its full value, "that if you won't do this for me, I will kill Mary Grant, and go away with her jewels, to lead my own life without you. If you choose you can denounce me. But in no other way, unless you help, and so save her life, can you prevent me from keeping my word. I love you now, and if you're brave enough to get fortune and a new start for us at this small risk, I'll love you all the rest of my life as no woman ever loved a man. If not ——"

"I'll do it!" he answered, the blood streaming up to his face.

She laced her fingers round his neck and drew him against her bosom. For a moment they stood thus, very still, clasped in each other's arms, her lips pressed to his.

XXXVI

At last Mary had time to think, and to write to Vanno.

In her dressing-bag, which the caretaker had carried up to her room, were writing materials. On a table in the middle of the room was the best lamp in the house. Apollonia had brought it to the beloved Signorina, as her ancestresses in the wild mountain village might have laid offerings on Baal's shrine. The new mistress was to have all the most beautiful and desirable things that the house could provide — was to have them in spite of herself; for Apollonia's heart held no warmth for those friends whom the Signorina had placed in the best rooms.

Mary was not conscious of fatigue, yet she sat with her elbows resting heavily on the table, her chin in her hands. The lamp stood at the left side; and in front was the great uncurtained window. As her eyes looked to the stars, it was as if their eyes flashed brightly back, through rents in the black veil of cloud.

"What am I to say to Vanno?" she asked herself.

The first hopefulness grasped as a crutch for failing courage had broken down hours ago. At best it had been something unseen to which she might cling in the dark. She had said: "By and

by I shall know what to do. I won't give him up. I shall tell him I'm innocent. He'll believe in me without any proof." But now she was face to face with the great question, and must meet point after point as it was presented to her mind.

She had promised Marie to keep the secret. She had sworn by her love for Vanno and Vanno's love for her that she would not tell him nor any one; that she would not even speak out in confession to a priest. Yes! But when she promised she did not dream that her whole future happiness and perhaps Vanno's would depend upon the issue. Surely she could not be expected to sacrifice everything for Marie, who had betrayed her, who had made the cruellest use of a friend's loyalty. The most severe judge would grant the right to tell Vanno the history of this day: what Marie had done; and how in spite of all, even when Angelo insulted her, she, Mary, had kept silence for the sake of the family honour and peace.

The girl told herself this; but deep down, under the repeated assurances which she forced upon her conscience, a whisper made itself clearly heard. "Even if you have this right," the voice said, "will it bring you happiness to use it? Think what it means. You tell Vanno that his brother's wife is a woman who sinned before her marriage and deceived her husband. That she lied and let you suffer for her sake, rather than Angelo should find out what she was; that Angelo insulted you, saying you were no fit companion for his wife, whom you had saved;

that because of his insults you had to leave his house. When Vanno hears these things from you he will believe them, and, besides, they can very well be proved. But can you make up to him by your love for all he will have to lose? He will not consent to let you suffer for Marie. He will insist on proving to Angelo which of the two is guilty. The brothers will hate each other. Marie perhaps may kill herself. The Duke will know that Vanno and Angelo have quarrelled hopelessly, even if he learns no more than that. The family life which has been happy will be embittered — through you. On the other hand, Vanno will have nothing but your love."

All this the voice said, and Mary had no argument with which to talk it down.

There was one alternative, and she turned to it desperately: She could write, or even telegraph Vanno, saying, "Come to me before you see Angelo. I have something to tell you." He would come, and she could say, "Your Cousin Idina Bland tried to ruin Marie with her husband. There was a story about a girl who had been at the convent where I was brought up. Marie said it must be true not of her but of me, if it were true at all. The only part really true is that I was at the Convent of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake. I did none of the things Angelo may tell you I did. Do you love me enough and want me enough to take me without proof of what I say? Because I have a good reason for not even trying to give any proof."

This would seem very strange to Vanno — that

she should have a good reason for not trying to prove her truth; but Mary thought, now that he knew her well and loved her well, he would take her in spite of all, rather than give her up. But — could she let him take her in that way?

No matter how great his love, the question must creep into his mind sometimes: "What if she is the woman Angelo thinks her? What if she has made a fool of me?" Such thoughts, even though thrust out by him with violence, must mingle poison with his happiness, and at last cloud the brightness of his love. Besides, they two would have to live apart from his people. If she were Vanno's wife, he and Angelo could not be friends.

It began to seem, after all, as if there were no way out. Whether she kept her word to Marie or broke it, as Marie deserved, never, it seemed, could she and Vanno know untroubled happiness together. The music of their love must at best be jarred by discords: and looking to the stars behind the drifting clouds, Mary told herself with a bursting heart that it would be kinder to break with Vanno now.

For a long time she sat at the table without moving, her chin in her hands, her eyes always on the window. The fire of wood which Apollonia had lighted died down to a heap of red-jewelled ashes. The room, long unused and but superficially heated, became cold with the harsh, relentless cold of a vault. Mary's body lost its warmth, and grew chill as marble. When she was ready to write she could

scarcely move her hands, but she warmed her fingers by breathing upon them, and at last began her letter to Vanno.

Dearest of all you will be to me forever [she wrote], but something has happened which must part us. Your brother will explain, in his way. It is not my way; but there are reasons why I must not explain at all, except to say to you, dearest, that I am the Mary of your love, not the Mary your brother thinks me. None of those things which he will tell you, have I done. But I have thought a great deal, and I have prayed to be wise for you, even more than for myself. At first I felt I could not give you up; but now I see that it will be better for us to part, rather than for me to take you selfishly away from your family. You love me, I know, and this will hurt you. I think you will say that I am wrong; but by and by you will realize that what I do is for the best.

My only love, I want you to be happy, and so I ask you to forget me. Not quite, perhaps! I couldn't bear that; but all I will let myself wish for is a sweet memory without pain. Don't try to find me. I must not change my mind, and it would be agony to part from you if I saw your face and your dear eyes. It is easier and better this way. And I am going to a place where I shall be as happy as I can ever be without you.

I shall not send back your ring, for I know you would like me to keep it; and please keep the few little things I have given you, unless you would rather not be reminded of me by them.

I cannot send you my heart, because it is with you already and will be always.

MARY.

She was crying as she finished the letter, and the tears were hot on her cold cheeks. She tried not to let them fall on the paper, for she did not want Vanno

to know how she suffered. If he realized that her heart was breaking for him, he might search for her. She was afraid of herself when she thought what it would be like to resist the pleading of his voice, his arms, his eyes — "those stars of love," as Marie had said.

The best way to prevent Vanno from guessing where she had gone would be to have her letter posted by Lord Dauntrey in Monte Carlo to-morrow. And instead of sending it to Rome, she would address it to him at Cap Martin. Then he would not have it until he came back to Angelo's house; and if he meant to disobey and look for her, days must pass before he was likely to learn of her whereabouts. She believed that no one who knew her face had seen her in the carriage, driving to Italy. She was more safely hidden than if she had come to the Château Lontana by train; and she had told Vanno and others that she disliked the idea of living in Hannaford's house. Before any one thought of this place, she would perhaps have gone; and though when she began Vanno's letter she had not decided where to go, before she finished her mind was made up. The one spot in which she could endure to live out the rest of her life was the Convent of St. Ursula-of-the-Lake.

"I ought never to have come away," she said. Yet not at the price of twice this suffering — if she could suffer more — would she blot out from her soul the experience life had given her. Maybe, she thought, the blow that shattered her love-story and

her happiness was a punishment for weakness in longing for the world. Yet if it were a punishment she was ready to kiss the rod, since she might hold forever the memory of Vanno and his love.

She fastened up her letter to him lest she should be tempted to add other words to those which might on second reading seem cold. God knew if she were cold! But Vanno might suffer less if he believed her so.

By and by, when something like calmness came to her again, she began another letter. It was to Reverend Mother at the convent. The last time Mary wrote she had told of her engagement, and her happiness. Reverend Mother had written back, forgiving and understanding her long silence — a loving letter, rejoicing in her joy; and it was in Mary's writing case at this moment, for she had intended to keep it always. But she could not have borne the pain of rereading it now, over the dead body of her happiness. She wrote quickly, not pausing between words and sentences, as in writing to Vanno. She told Reverend Mother nothing of the story, but said that she was ending her engagement with Prince Giovanni Della Robbia. "It is not because I don't love him," she explained, "but because I love him so dearly I want to do what is best for his whole life. I know that I shall love him always. I can no more forget him than I can forget that I have a heart which must go on beating while I live. But if you don't think a love like this — expecting, hoping for no return — too worldly, oh, Reverend

Mother, will you let me come back to you and take the vows after all? I feel the convent is the only home for me; and I believe I am capable of higher, nobler aims because of what I have been taught by a great love. I yearn to be with you now, I am so homesick! I will go through any penance, even if it be years long, if at the end you will accept me for your daughter. I beg of you to write at once, and say if you will have me again. If your answer be yes, I will start immediately. I can hardly wait."

As she folded the letter she remembered how Hannaford had told the story of Galatea, likening her to the statue which had been given life without knowledge of the world. It was almost as if his voice spoke to her now, in this room he had loved, answering when she asked what became of Galatea in the end. "She went back to be a statue." "That is what I shall do," Mary said. "I shall go back into the marble."

All night long the mistral blew; and "out of the fall of lonely seas and the wind's sorrow," the lullaby Hannaford had desired for his ashes was sung under the rock where, already, his urn was enshrined.

At dawn the wild wailing ceased suddenly, as if the wind had drowned itself in the ocean; and Mary went out on to her balcony, in the dead silence which was like peace after war. The hollow bell of the sky, swept clear of clouds by the steel broom of the mistral, blazed with blue fire, and the sea was so crystal pure that it seemed one might look down

through violet depths into the caves of the merpeople. The still air was very cold; and it seemed to Mary that if the joy of life were not exhausted for her, she might have felt excited and exuberantly happy, alone with the lovely miracle of this new day. As it was, she felt curiously calm, almost resigned to the thought that her heart, like a clock, had run down at the last hour of its happiness. She said to herself that Nemesis had brought her to this house, and there made her lay down her hopes of love. She had accepted much from Captain Hannaford, and had thought of him hardly at all. Now, it was almost as if she were offering this sacrifice to him. "It is Destiny," she said, as Eve Dauntrey had said a few hours ago.

The tired sea had gone to sleep, and was breathing deeply in its dreams, but to Mary it was not the same happy sea that she had looked out upon from her window at Rose Winter's, and at the Villa Mirasole. The little mumbling, baby mouths of the breathing waves bit toothlessly upon the rocks. Mary pitied the faintly heaving swells because they were to her fancy like wretched drowning animals, trying vainly forever to crawl up on land, and forever falling back.

"When I am in the convent, if Reverend Mother will take me in, I shall never look at the sea again," she thought, "yet I shall always hear it in my heart, remembering last night and to-day. After this I shall be only a hollow shell full of memories, as a shell is full of the voice of the sea."

Lady Dauntrey dared not let her husband take Mary's letters to the post until she had steamed the envelopes, and read what the girl had to say. If she had herself dictated those farewell words to Prince Vanno, they could not have suited her better; and there was nothing objectionable in the appeal to Reverend Mother at the Scotch convent. Only, perhaps it would be as well to keep back that letter for a day or two. The one to Vanno Lord Dauntrey carried with him to Monte Carlo, and posted it there according to Mary's wish.

XXXVII

One afternoon of pouring rain a two-horse, covered cab from Monte Carlo splashed in at the gate of Stellamare, turned noisily on the wet gravel, and stopped in front of Jim Schuyler's marble portico. There was luggage on the cab; and from the vehicle, with rain pelting on her head, descended a girl in a brown travelling dress.

The butler, who acted also as valet for Jim, was engaged in packing for his master, who intended to leave for America next day. A servant (new to the house) answered the door and regarded the visitor with round eyes of astonishment. Few callers came to Stellamare, as Schuyler seldom received those whom he had not specially invited, and never had the footman seen a woman arrive alone.

"Is Mr. Schuyler at home?" the girl asked briskly, in English. The young man looked helpless, and she repeated the question in French.

"Not at home, Mademoiselle," the reply came promptly.

"I know he is always officially out," said the visitor. "But if he is in the house he will see me. I am his cousin, and I've just arrived from Scotland. Tell him, please, that Miss Maxwell has come."

"And the baggage, Mademoiselle?" the stricken

man inquired. "Am I to have it taken down? Monsieur leaves for America to-morrow."

"The baggage can stay where it is for the present," said Peter. "You may show me into the library."

"But Monsieur is there."

"All the better. Then I will give him a surprise. You needn't be afraid. He won't be angry with you."

The footman, having already observed that the amazing visitor was not only pretty but *chic*, decided to obey.

"Mees Maxwell," he announced at the door of the library, and leaving the lady to explain herself, discreetly vanished.

Schuyler was in the act of selecting from his bookshelves a few favourite volumes to take with him from this home of peace, back to the hurly-burly. Unable to believe his ears, he turned quickly, and then for half a second could not believe his eyes. Disarmed, his face told Peter a secret she had long wished to know with certainty. Therefore, though he spoke almost brusquely, and frowned at her instead of smiling, she was so happy that she could have sung for joy. "If I don't fix it all up to-day, my name isn't Molly Maxwell," she informed her inner self, in the quaint, practical way that Mary had loved.

"Peter — it can't be you!" Schuyler exclaimed.

"It's all that's left of me, after missing the luxe and travelling for about seventeen years in any sort of old train I could get," she replied with elaborate

nonchalance. "Kindly don't stare as if I were Banquo's ghost or something. I'm so tired and dusty and desperately hungry that if you don't grin at once I shall dissolve in tears."

She held out both hands, and Jim, aching to seize her in his arms and kiss her breath away, took the extended hands as if they had been marked "dangerous."

"Where's your father?" was his first question.

"In New York, as far as I know."

"Great Scott! you haven't come here from Scotland alone?"

"I thought I had, but if you say I haven't, perhaps I've been attended by spirit chaperons."

"My — dear girl, what has possessed you? You are looking impish. What have you come for?"

"Partly to see my darling, precious Mary Grant and criticise her Prince. Partly ——"

"Well?"

"Why does your face suddenly look as if you suspected me of criminal intentions?"

"Don't keep me in suspense, my dear goose!"

"Why not 'duck?' It's a day for ducks. Only you're so afraid of paying me compliments. I see you think you know why I've come. Tell me at once, or I won't play. Be frank."

"You really want frankness?"

"Of course. I'm afraid of nothing."

"Well, then — er — I couldn't help seeing in New York that you and Dick Carleton ——"

"Good gracious! if I'm a goose, what *are* you?

There's no word for it. Dick and I flirted — naturally. What are girls and men for?"

"I supposed this was more serious."

"Then you supposed wrong, as you generally have about me. I can't even *think* seriously of youths. Let Dick — fly."

Jim laughed out almost boyishly. "That's what I have let him do. Of course you know he's been visiting me — but he's gone with his *Flying Fish.*"

"So Mary Grant wrote in the one letter I've had from her. That's partly why I came straight to you. I thought you could tell me whether she was still in the bosom of her Princess Della Robbia, where she said she was going to visit for a few days."

"I believe she's still there. But you haven't told me yet the second part of your reason for coming out here — alone."

"It's not quite as simple to explain as the first part. But it is just as important. My most intimate Me forced me to start, the minute I got a letter from Dad saying he couldn't get away from New York till the end of May, and I must wait for him quietly at the convent. I haven't had a peaceful minute there since Mary Grant left. I felt in my bones she'd make straight for Monte Carlo, and knowing certain things about her father and other ancestors, I didn't think it would be a good place for her. The horrid dreams I've had about that girl have been enough to turn my hair gray! I shall probably have to take a course of treatment from a

beauty doctor, judging by the way you glare. Luckily it seems to have turned out all right for the dear angel. You know, she's my very bestest friend."

"I didn't know. How should I?"

"She might have told you. Besides, when Dad and I visited you, I showed you the photograph of a lot of girls, and pointed out Mary as my special chum. I said she'd made up her mind to take the vows."

"By Jove, that's why, when I first saw her face, I somehow associated her with you. I'd forgotten the photograph, though the connection was left, a vague, floating mystery that puzzled me. But I won't be switched off the other part of your reason. You say it's important."

"Desperately important. It may affect my whole future, and perhaps yours too, dear cousin, odd as that may seem to you, unless you recall the fable of the mouse and the lion."

"Which am I?"

"I leave that to your imagination. But talking of game, reminds me of food. Do feed me. I want what at the convent we call 'a high tea.' Cold chicken and bread and butter, and cake and jam — lots of both — and tea with cream in it. While you're pressing morsels between my starving lips, I will in some way or other, by word, or gesture, tell you about — the *other part*, which is so important to us both."

If his eyes had been on her then, he might have had an electric shock of sudden enlightenment, but he had turned his back, to go and touch the bell.

While the servant — ordered to bring everything good — was engaged in laying a small table, the two talked of Mary, and Jim told Peter what he knew of Vanno Della Robbia and his family. Peter had asked to have her "high tea" in Jim's library, because she knew it was the room he liked best, and was most associated with his daily life at Stellamare; but she pretended that it was because of the "special" view from the windows, over the cypress walk with the old garden statues, and down to what she used to call the "classic temple," in a grove of olives and stone pines close to the sea.

When tea came, she insisted upon giving Schuyler a cup. It would, she said, make him more human and sympathetic. Though she had pronounced herself to be starving, after all she was satisfied with very little. Having finished, she leaned her elbows on the table, and gazed out of the long window close by, at the rain which continued to fall in wicked black streaks against a clearing, sunset sky. "It's like the stripes on a tawny snake," she said, "or on a tiger's back. This isn't a proper Riviera day. And the mountains of Italy have put powder on their foreheads and noses. While it's rained down here, it's been snowing on the heights. As my French maid used to say, 'I think the weather's in train to rearrange itself.'"

"Never mind the weather," said Jim. "Tell me about the 'other part.' You've excited my curiosity."

"I meant to. But talking of the weather draws people together, don't you think? just as the thought

of tea does in England and dear old Scotland. Everybody everywhere having tea at the same time, you know, and the same feelings and thoughts. It's different abroad or in America. Tea's more like an accident than an institution."

"Never mind talking of tea, either."

"I'll talk about you, then."

"I want to talk about you — and what's going to become of you to-night."

"Only think, if I'd arrived to-morrow, I should have been too late!"

"Too late for what?"

"For the *other part.* You'd have been gone. But Fate's always kind to me. It made me come just in time."

"Tell me, then — about that other part. Do you want my advice?"

"Not exactly advice."

She looked at him across the little table, through the twilight. A sudden fire leaped up in his eyes, which usually looked coldly at life as if he had resigned himself to let its best things pass him by.

"Peter! You don't mean — you can't mean ——"

"Do you want me to mean it? — Do you want me——"

"Want you? I've wanted nothing else since before you were out of short frocks, but ——"

"Then why didn't you tell me so before I put them on? I was — oh, Jim, I was *dying* to hear it. I was afraid you didn't care in that way, that you

thought me a silly child always. That's why I went back to stay in the convent, to try and find peace, and forget. But when I heard about Mary and her love, I couldn't bear it there any longer. I hoped that perhaps, after all — and when I came to-day and you looked at me, I knew for certain. I felt so brave, and I made up my mind to propose, for I was sure *you* wouldn't. It's leap year, anyhow."

They were standing now, and Jim had her in his arms.

"I've been miserable without you," he said. "And it's all your fault. You made me sure it was no use. Don't you remember how you said one day that marrying a cousin must be like paying a long dull visit to relatives? — a thing you hated."

"And you took that to yourself?"

"Naturally. I supposed you thought it merciful to choke me off, so I shut up like an oyster. And then there was Dick ——"

"He never existed. Oh, Jim, we've both been rather silly, haven't we? But luckily we're both very young."

"I'm not. I'm almost old enough to be your father."

"You're just the right age for a lover. To think that by one speech which I made merely in order to be mildly witty, I came near spoiling the whole show! But you ought to have known better. You're such a distant, uttermost, outlying cousin — a hill brigand of a cousin claiming my relationship or my life."

"I'm going to claim more than either now."

"My gracious! I do hope so, or I shall have come to visit you in vain."

Nobody thought of the unfortunate cabman, but he was not neglectful of his own interests; and having covered his horses and refreshed himself with secret stores of wine and bread, he was asleep under an immense umbrella when, after dark, his existence was remembered. By this time, it was too late in Jim's opinion for Peter to go and call at Princess Della Robbia's. Mary would have begun to dress for dinner, if she were at home; and, besides, a place for Peter to spend the night must be found without delay. She could visit Mary in the morning.

Jim tabooed the idea of a hotel, but thought of Mrs. Winter, as most of her acquaintances did think of her when they wanted practical advice or help. Peter's luggage was transferred from the cab to Jim's automobile, the sleepy *cocher* was paid above his demands, and the happiest man on the Riviera spun off alone with the happiest girl, in a closed motor car, to Monte Carlo. The chauffeur was told not to drive fast.

Providentially, "St. George's" dreaded aunt had gone, having been told by a doctor that the climate was too exciting for her state of health.

The Winters' spare room was free, and the chaplain and his wife were delighted. News of Mary there was none except that, three or four nights ago, she had called while George and Rose were at Nice and had taken her jewel-case, leaving no message but

"her love." Rose supposed that Mary must have wanted some of her pretty things for an entertainment at the Villa Mirasole. Prince Vanno had been away in Rome, but must be due, if he had not already returned. Probably if Miss Maxwell went over to Cap Martin in the morning she would see not only Mary but the Prince, who, said Rose, "looked like a knight-errant or a reformer of the Middle Ages, but, oh, so handsome and so young!"

"I thought when I first saw them together, the very evening of their engagement," she added, "that there was something *fatal* about them, as if they were not born for ordinary, happy lives, like the rest of us. But thank goodness, I seem to be mistaken. The course of their true love runs so smoothly it almost ceases to be interesting."

XXXVIII

Jim Schuyler did not leave Stellamare next day. His butler-valet had the pleasure of unpacking again. The motor was at Peter's service in the morning, and soon after eleven she was driving through the beautiful gateway of the Villa Mirasole.

Americo answered her ring, bowing politely, but one who knew the ruddy brown face would have seen that he was not himself. In some stress of emotion the man in him had got the better of the servant. His eyes were round as an owl's as he informed the stranger that Miss Grant was no longer at the villa. He even forgot to speak English, a sign with him of deep mental disturbance.

"Where has Miss Grant gone?" Peter inquired, thinking the fellow an idiot.

"I do not know, Mademoiselle."

"Then go and inquire, please."

"I regret, it is useless. No one in this house can tell where Mees Grant is."

"You must be mistaken. I'll send my name to the Princess and ask her to see a friend of Miss Grant's."

Americo's face quivered, and his eyes bulged. "Mademoiselle," he said, "I do not think her Highness can see any one this morning. There is — family trouble."

Peter still hesitated, determined somehow to get news of Mary. Could it be that the engagement had been broken off? she asked herself. As she stood wondering what to do, a tall young man flashed from an inner room into the vestibule, seized a hat from a table, and without appearing to see the butler, pushed past the distressed Americo. He would have passed Peter also like a whirlwind, unconscious of her existence, had she not called out sharply, "Is it Prince Giovanni Della Robbia?"

He wheeled abruptly as a soldier on drill, and stared sombrely from under frowning brows. His pallor and stifled fury of impatience made him formidable, almost startling. Peter thought of a wounded stag at bay.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered, losing the gay self-confidence of the spoilt and pretty American girl. "I'm a great friend of Mary Grant's. I must know where she is."

The man's faced changed instantly. Fierce impatience became fiery eagerness. For a second or two he looked at Peter without speaking, his interest too intense to find expression in words. Then, as she also was silent, he said:

"There is no one I would rather see than a friend of Mary's, except Mary herself. Tell me where you knew her."

"At the convent in Scotland," Peter answered promptly. "I suppose she's told you about it. Did she mention her friend Molly Maxwell?"

"She said she had two friends named Mary. We

had little time to talk together — not many days in all. When did you see her last?"

"In November, just before she left the convent. She went and stayed with an aunt a few weeks in London, and then came here. She wrote me about you, and I recognized you from her description. That's why I ——"

"Forgive me. I believe you can be of the greatest service to Mary, and to me." He glanced at Americo, who held the door open. "Let us walk in the woods, if you aren't afraid of damp. I've something important to say."

They went down the steps and out of the gate together, like old acquaintances. Peter had no longer any doubt that the "family trouble" concerned Mary; but it was easy to see that whatever it might be, Prince Vanno was on her side. Peter admired him, and burned to serve her friend.

"There has been an abominable lie told," Vanno began, as soon as they were outside his brother's gate. "I must explain to you quickly what's happened, if you're to understand. I went to Rome to tell my father of our engagement. I left Mary with my brother and sister-in-law. I had two happy letters from her. This morning I arrived here in the Rome express. I came straight to Cap Martin, expecting to find Mary. Instead I found my brother and his wife alone. My sister-in-law, I must say in justice, seemed terribly grieved at what had happened. She could or would tell me nothing. But Angelo — my brother — began some rigmarole about

Mary having run away from her convent-school years ago with a man, and — but I won't repeat the story. I refused to listen. I can never forgive my brother."

"Good for you!" exclaimed the American girl. "But I see the whole thing, and you needn't even try to repeat the story. I know it without your telling. It happened to another girl with a name almost exactly like Mary's. That's how the mistake must have come about. The girl who ran away disappeared about four years ago. *My* Mary was at the convent till last fall. I can prove everything I say."

"Will you see my brother and his wife now, and tell them what you know?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Thank God you came! In another minute I should have been gone. And I don't know where to look for Mary."

"You don't know? Didn't she write? Or did she expect you to believe things against her?"

"I could hardly have blamed her if she had expected it, for — I failed her once. But that was before I knew her. Nothing could make me doubt her now. She did write to me. I found a letter waiting at the villa this morning — a letter postmarked Monte Carlo, to say I mustn't look for her — that all is over for ever and ever."

"But you're going to look for her all the same?"

"And to find her. I won't rest till I've got her back."

"You're the right sort of man, though you aren't an American."

"My mother was one."

"So much the better. Let's go into the house, and I'll soon make your people swallow any words they've said against Mary."

Americo was still at the door, or had returned there. "Highness," he said, "the Princess wishes me to make you come in. She has to talk. She send me in woods, but I not go, because of young lady with you. I wait here. Princess in yellow saloon, by her lone."

"Come," Vanno said to Peter. "We'll speak to her, and find out what she wants. Then my brother shall come and hear your story."

"Go first and explain me, please," Peter said.

Vanno would have obeyed, but Princess Della Robbia gave him no time. She was wandering restlessly about the room, too impatient to sit down. When she saw Vanno at the door, she went to him swiftly. "I'm so glad Americo found you," she cried. "I need to have a word with you alone. Angelo is so hard! He wouldn't let me see Mary before she went, or even write her a line of love and sympathy. I've hardly eaten or slept since that awful afternoon. If you could know how ill I am, you wouldn't blame me so much! I love Mary. My heart's breaking for her trouble. But I can do nothing, except send a letter for you to give, in case you find her. Please take it — I've written it already, in case — and don't tell Angelo."

"I've brought a friend of Mary's who can prove to you both that she isn't the heroine of that story you and my brother were so quick to believe," Vanno broke in, lacking patience to hear her through.

With a faint "Oh!" Marie shrank back, looking suddenly smaller and older. The pretty hand which had pressed Vanno's sleeve dropped heavily as if its many rings weighed the fingers down. Sickly pale, she fixed her eyes upon him, unable to speak, though her lips fell apart, seeming to form the word "Who?"

Vanno waited for no further explaining, but called Peter, who hovered outside the open door. "Miss Maxwell, will you come?"

Peter appeared instantly, but seeing the Princess, stopped on the threshold, with the face of one who meets a ghost. "Marie Grant!" she exclaimed, the two short words explosive as revolver shots.

The figure in white collapsed like a tossed bundle, into a chair. It seemed that the woman ceased to breathe. In a second the peculiar freshness of her beauty had shrivelled as if scorched by a rushing flame. Only her eyes were alive. They moved wistfully from Peter to Vanno, and from Vanno to the half-open door, as if seeking mercy or escape. She looked agonized, broken, like a fawn caught in a trap.

Peter turned to Vanno. "This is the girl who ran away from our convent with a man," she said crudely. "As she's here in the house, how did Mary come to be suspected?"

"That is my sister-in-law, Princess Della Robbia," Vanno answered. As he spoke his forehead flamed, and his eyes grew keen as swords. His look stripped Marie's soul bare of lies.

She held out her hands, but there was no mercy for her then in either heart. In a moment the two had judged her, with the unhesitating cruelty of youth. Peter's eyes narrowed in disgust, as if the white thing cowering in the chair were a noxious animal, a creature to be exterminated.

"I understand too, very well," she said slowly. "Horrible, wicked woman! You put the blame of your own sins on my Mary, to save yourself, and like the saint she is, she let you do it. But I won't. God sent me here, I see now. You've got to confess, and right my girl."

Tears fell from Marie's eyes. Her face quivered, then crinkled up piteously as a child's face crinkles in a storm of weeping. "Shut the door," she stammered between sobs. "For God's sake, shut the door! If Angelo should come!"

Neither Vanno nor Peter moved. They wished Angelo to come. Seeing them stand there, rigid, relentless, Marie realized as she had not fully realized before that they were her enemies, that no softness or prettiness, no agony of tears could turn their hearts. She sprang up with a choking cry, and stumbled toward the door. Vanno, thinking she meant to run away, took two long steps and placed himself before her.

"Angel with the flaming sword!" were the words

that spoke themselves in Peter's mind. But she had no pity yet for Marie.

"I — I only want to shut the door—that's all — because you wouldn't," the Princess faltered. "Just for a few minutes. It's all I ask. Give me a little time."

Vanno closed the door without noise, and stood in front of it like a sentinel. "You may have a few minutes," he said. "Then I shall call Angelo to hear the truth from you or from me. It's for you to choose which."

"Haven't you any mercy in your heart?" she wailed. "I'm only a woman. I'm your brother's wife. He loves me."

"I love Mary," Vanno said.

"It was Mary who spared me. She saw it was worse for me than for her, because I'm married to Angelo. My whole life's at stake. That's why she sacrificed herself. I ——"

"The more you say, the worse you make us hate you," Peter cut her short. "You were always selfish. Even when I liked you, I used to think you just like a white Persian cat. When you were petted, you purred. When things went wrong, you scratched. You don't deserve the name of woman. What you've done is as bad as murder."

"I did it for Angelo," Marie pleaded. "I love him so! I couldn't lose his love."

"So you flung Mary to the wolves!" Vanno said. He had not believed that he could see a woman cry without pitying and wishing to help her. But his heart felt hard as stone as he watched Marie's

streaming tears. All the brutality of his fierce ancestors had rushed to arms in his nature. The fancy came to his mind that he would still be hard and cold if he had to see her flogged. Then at the suggested picture, something in him writhed and revolted. He was not so hard as he had thought. He had to steel himself against her by thinking of what she had done to Mary.

"You deserve to die!" said Peter.

"I want to die," Marie answered pitifully. She stood supporting herself with an arm that clung to the high straight back of a Florentine chair. "If you will only not tell Angelo till I am dead, that's all I'll ask. Please wait — a little while. I couldn't live and look him in the face if he knew, so I would have to kill myself before you told. I'm too unhappy to be afraid of dying — for my own sake. I've suffered such agonies of fear, nothing could be worse. But there's a reason why it would be wicked to die just now — of my own accord. There's a child coming — in a few months. Afterward, I'll swear to you to kill myself, and then you can tell Angelo everything. Won't you wait till then — only till the end of the summer? Mary would say yes, if she were here."

The one weapon by which she could defend herself against their justice, she had drawn, and stood weakly on guard, her strength spent.

Vanno and Peter looked at one another in silence, in the eyes of each the same question. "Is this the truth?"

Marie read their faces. "Angelo knows that there will be a baby," she whispered. "Indeed it's true. As soon as my child is born, I'm ready to die."

"No one wants you to die!" Peter said sharply.

"Except myself. I must die if you're going to tell. If you won't wait, it will have to be now, at any cost."

"You know that you force us to wait," Vanno answered. "Trust weak woman to conquer! We cannot wish for your death. But I'll find Mary and marry her, in spite of herself. As for my brother, never will I forgive him. And I hope that I may never see you or Angelo again. Let your own soul punish you, while you live."

"Are we to go?" asked Peter.

"Yes," Vanno said.

They went out together, and left Marie staring after them.

For a little while she was safe.

XXXIX

All this time Jim Schuyler's motor had been waiting. It was strange to go out into the sunshine and see the smart chauffeur in his place, placidly reading a newspaper.

"Won't you come with me to Monte Carlo?" Peter asked. "We may find Mary at a hotel."

"I will come," Vanno said. "Her letter was posted there, yet I feel she has gone. She used to talk about Italy, but I don't think she would go to the house Hannaford left her. She couldn't bear the idea of living in his place."

"Let's go straight to Mrs. Winter's and ask her advice," Peter suggested. "She told me all about the Château Lontana last night."

They sat silent as the motor carried them swiftly along the white road. Peter longed to talk, but all the things she most wished to say were impossible to put into words. How Marie had checkmated them! It was like her, Peter thought; but she did not doubt the truth of that thing the Princess had said. There are some looks, some tones, which cannot lie.

Peter did not see what other course they could have taken, instead of that which they had chosen quickly, without discussion, accepting the inevitable.

She believed, and she thought Vanno believed, that Marie would have kept her word and killed herself if they had persisted in telling Angelo what she was and had done. She had begged them to "wait a little while," but it was not only a question of waiting. Marie, as usual, had done well for herself. Vanno could not in cold blood, after months had passed and Marie was the mother of his brother's child, tell Angelo the story. At least, Peter was sure he would not bring himself to do that. Even she, who detested Marie now with an almost tigerish hatred, could not imagine herself pouring out such a tale when the first fire of rage had died — no, not even in defence of Mary; for Mary would be the one of all others to say, "Do not speak." Yet it filled Peter with fury to think that now no one could fight for Mary — sweet Mary, who was not by nature one to fight for herself. The great wrong had been done. Vanno could not forgive his brother's injustice. The two would be separated in heart and life while Marie lived. All this through Marie's sin and cowardice in covering it. Yet even those she had injured could not urge her on to death.

Suddenly, just as the motor slowed down near the Monaco frontier, Peter cried out, "There's Mrs. Winter, walking!"

She touched an electric bell, and the chauffeur stopped his car.

Rose was taking her morning exercise. She looked up, smiling at sight of Peter and Vanno getting out of the automobile to meet her.

"Where's Mary?" she asked, then checked herself quickly. She saw by the two faces that something was wrong. "Mary's not ill, I hope?" she amended her question.

Peter left the explanation to Vanno. It concerned his family, and how much he might choose to tell she did not know.

"There's been a misunderstanding," he said. "I came back this morning to find Mary gone. I'm afraid my brother and sister-in-law were not kind to her, and nothing can ever be the same between us again because of that. But the one important thing is to find Mary. She has — thrown me over, in a letter, and it does not tell me where she is. Do you think she can be in Monte Carlo?"

"No, I don't," Rose replied with her usual promptness. "What a shame I was out when she called the other night. Perhaps she would have confided in me. Now I see why she took her jewellery. Maybe she needed money. If we'd been at home, we'd have made her stay with us. Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if she'd gone to the Château Lontana?"

"I thought of that," Vanno said, "but she didn't want to live in Hannaford's house."

"With you! But now she's alone and sad, poor child. If we could only be sure, you could telegraph, not to waste time. I'll tell you what! If she went there, she probably drove instead of taking a train. Wait a minute, while I ask the hunchbacked beggar if he saw her. They were great chums; and it was talking to him I came across her first."

Rose began running to the bridge, where the dwarf, in his shady hat and comfortable cloak, was engaged in eating his luncheon on a newspaper, kept down on the parapet with stones. Vanno and Peter followed quickly, but before they arrived Rose had extracted the desired information. "He did see Mary three nights ago, in a carriage, driving in the direction of Italy," she announced in triumph. "He was just starting for home. What a good thing he hadn't gone!"

"There was another lady in the carriage with my Mademoiselle," added the beggar in bad French, his mouth full of bread and cheese.

"Another lady!" Rose echoed. "Who could it have been?"

"A dark lady, young but not a girl," the hunchback cheerfully went on. "She looked out at me, then threw herself back as if she did not want me to see who she was. Perhaps because she did not wish to spare me a penny, and was ashamed. Some people are stingy."

"Did you know the lady's face?"

"No, I never saw it before that I can remember. It was not a sweet face like Mademoiselle's. That lady would laugh while a beggar starved. I always know at the first look. I have trained myself to judge. It is my metier."

He spoke with pride, but no one was listening.

"A dark woman," Vanno repeated. "What has become of the Dauntreys? Do you know, Mrs. Winter?"

"I heard yesterday that they'd disappeared, owing every one money."

"Miss Maxwell, will you let me go now at once to Italy in your car?" Vanno asked.

"Yes," Peter said. "It's not my car, but it belongs to my best friend. He and I will both be glad, but you must take me with you."

Rose looked wistful, but she did not ask to go. The others were not thinking of her.

"Do you know the Château Lontana?" she inquired of Schuyler's chauffeur. "And have you got your papers for Italy?"

The man, who was English, touched his cap. "Yes, Madam, I know where the place is. And everything is in order."

As a last thought, Vanno went to the beggar and put two gold pieces into his knotted hand. The little man's red-rimmed eyes glittered with joyful astonishment. He bit first one coin, then the other.

Peter had expected Jim in the afternoon, but Rose promised to telephone.

Neither the girl nor Vanno thought of lunching. They went on without a pause except for the formalities at the Italian frontier, and it was early in the afternoon when the car slowed down before the closed gates of the Château Lontana. The chauffeur got out and tried to open them, but they were locked. He turned to the Prince for instructions. "What are we to do, sir? There is no bell." His tone was plaintive, for he was hungry and consequently irritable.

Vanno jumped out and tried the gates in vain. The chauffeur looked at the ground to hide his pleasure in the gentleman's failure. Peter peered from the car anxiously. "Perhaps Mary didn't come here after all, or else she's gone away," the girl suggested. "It would have meant a horrid delay, trying to find the cabman who drove her from Monte Carlo, but after all it might have been better."

Vanno was ungallant enough not to answer. He was hardly conscious that Peter was speaking. The iron gates, set between tall stone posts, were very high. On the other side an ill-kept road overgrown with bunches of rough grass wound up the cypress and olive clad hill. At the very top stood the house which somewhat pretentiously named itself a château. It was built of the beautiful mottled stone of the country, brown and gray, veined and splashed with green, purple, yellow, and rose pink. There were two square towers and several large balconies and terraces with windows looking out upon them; but the windows in sight were closed and shuttered. The thick flowering creepers which almost covered the walls as high as the windows of the second story — roses, bougainvillea, plumbago, and convolvulus — were tangled and matted together, great branches trailing over the shut eyes of the windows. Cypresses and olives were untrimmed, and there was a straggling wilderness of orange trees. The place had a sad yet poetic look of having been forgotten by the world.

Vanno knew little of its history, except that an

elderly French woman, a great actress long before his time, had bought and lived in the house for many years, letting the whole property fall into decay while her money was given to the Casino.

It seemed impossible that Mary could be there behind those shuttered windows, but he was determined not to go away without being sure. Rose Winter had said half jestingly that Lady Dauntrey was a woman who might "look on her neighbour's jewels when it was dark." And Vanno had taken a dislike to the hostess at the Villa Bella Vista. He had been glad to take Mary out of her hands, to put her in charge of Rose Winter. As he stood and stared at the high, locked gates he remembered what the beggar had said about the dark woman who threw herself back in the carriage as if she did not wish to be seen.

"Shall I blow my horn and try to make some one come?" asked Schuyler's chauffeur.

"No, I think not," Vanno said on reflection. "I have an idea that if people are there, they won't come down for that. I can get over all right if you'll back the car close to the gates."

The chauffeur's expression withdrew itself like a snail within its shell, but suddenly he became interested enough to forget his hunger. He had supposed that the young lady wished to pay a mere call at a time of day inconvenient to him: but evidently there was something under the surface of this excursion. He had not stopped the engine, and turning the motor with the bonnet toward France, he

carefully backed against the iron grating. In a moment Vanno had climbed on to the top of the car, had swung himself over the gate, and dropped down on the other side. The chauffeur, who, like most of his countrymen, hated to be made conspicuous, rejoiced that this was accomplished when the road was empty. He would not have enjoyed being stared at even by a peasant in a cart.

Peter was out in the road, watching Vanno's manœuvres. "I wish I could do that!" she exclaimed.

"I'll let you in, or send some one to unlock the gates if possible," he promised. Then as he walked swiftly up the avenue his thoughts rushed far ahead, and he forgot Peter.

The motor moved a little away from the gates, and waited. It waited a long time and no sign of life showed on the blank face of the house. For many minutes Peter stood in the road, looking up, hoping to see Vanno, or a servant coming with a key. But nothing happened, and when she had grown very tired of standing, she reluctantly went back to the car. She sat leaning forward, her face at the window, gazing at the house; and at last she began to be angry with Vanno. Surely he might come or send, knowing how anxious she must be to hear of Mary. It was too inconsiderate to leave her there in suspense!

Vanno hoped that he might find Mary in the garden; for mounting from lower to higher levels, above the cypresses and olives which formed a wind

screen for upper terraces near the house, he saw viewpoints furnished with seats of old, carved marble, pergolas roofed with masses of banksia, and one long arbour, darkly green, with crimson camelias flaming at the far end like a magic lamp. At any moment a slender white figure might start up from a marble bench, or gleam out like a statue against a background of clipped laurel or box. He began to feel so strongly conscious of a loved and loving presence, that he was as much surprised as disappointed when he reached the steps leading up to the house-terrace without having seen Mary. If he had been willing to harbour superstitious fancies then, he would have believed that Mary had sent her spirit to meet him in this mournfully sweet garden; but less than at any other time would he listen to whispers of superstition. Vanno pulled the old-fashioned bell of the front door, and heard it ring janglingly with that peculiar plaintiveness which bells have in empty houses. It seemed to complain of being roused from sleep, when waking could give no promise of hope or pleasure.

Twice Vanno rang, and then there came the sound of unlocking and unbolting. A handsome and very dark young woman of the peasant class looked out at him questioningly, with eyes of topaz under black brows that met in a straight line across her forehead. The eyes lit when Vanno spoke to her in Italian, and she beamed when he inquired for Miss Grant.

"The beautiful Signorina!" she exclaimed. "The gracious Signore is a relative who has come for her?"

"We are to be married," he answered with the frank simplicity of Italians in such matters.

"Heaven be praised!" the woman cried. "Will the Signore step into the house?"

"She is here, then?" Vanno asked, entering the vestibule that opened into the white coldness of the hall.

"She has been here for three nights and two days."

"Thank God!" Vanno muttered under his breath. An immense relief, like a bath of balm, eased the pain of suspense. He felt that he had come to the end of his trouble. After all, what did Angelo or any one in the world matter, except Mary? He trusted himself to make her realize this. A few minutes more and she would be in his arms, on his heart, and her scruples would be burnt to ashes in the fire of his love.

"Will you tell the Signorina that Prince Giovanni Della Robbia has come?" he said.

The woman threw out her hands in a gesture of apology and regret.

"The Signora will not let me go into the room," she answered, and a look of sullen ferocity opened a door into depths of her nature where fire smouldered. She lifted her eyes to Vanno's, and for a long instant the Prince and the peasant gazed fixedly at each other. At the end of that instant Vanno knew that this woman hated the "Signora" and her commands; and Apollonia knew that this man would protect her through any disobedience.

"Why does the Signorina keep her room?"

"It seems that she is not well."

"When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday morning, Principe. I went then to her room to prepare her bath, and to take her coffee with bread which I had toasted."

"Was she not well then?"

"When I inquired after her health she said she had not slept. And the night before it had been the same. She was pale, very pale, and there were shadows under her eyes, but she did not complain of illness. While I was there the Signora came and since then the young lady has not been out of her room."

"What is that Signora's name?" Vanno asked.

"I do not know, Principe, I have not been told, and I do not understand the sound of English words, though I have learned a little French."

"Is the lady's husband here?"

"Oh, yes, a very sad, tired-looking gentleman who seems to be ill himself; but he is a doctor. I know that, for when I offered to make a tisane of orange flowers for the Signorina to soothe her nerves and bring her sleep, she thanked me, but said the Signore had got her a sleeping draught made up the day before, when he went back over the French frontier. She told me that he was a doctor, and had prescribed for her."

"A doctor!" Vanno repeated, suddenly puzzled. He had been confident that the "Signore and Signora" were Lord and Lady Dauntrey. But he had never heard that Dauntrey had studied medicine

and practised in South Africa. "Where is the Signore now?" he asked quickly.

"He was with his wife in the room of the Signorina a short time ago."

"Take me to the door of that room, and I will talk with one of them.

"Oh, with the greatest joy, Principe. I have not been happy leaving them alone with her, but what could I do? I am only a servant."

"Why were you not happy leaving them alone with her? Did you think they might do her harm?"

Apollonia shrugged her shoulders, and tears sparkled in her eyes, yellow as the eyes of a lioness. "How can I tell, Principe? She said they were her friends. And the Signore has not a bad face. But it is his wife who rules. And something in myself tells me she is wicked, and does not truly love the Signorina. I have been a wondering whether I should go into that room in spite of those two, and force them to leave her. I would not have minded frightening them with a big knife I keep in the kitchen for cutting bread, only that would have alarmed the Signorina. And perhaps they are not bad after all. Then I should have been wrong. I have thought so much yesterday and to-day about this thing that I seem to have wheels spinning in my head. I thank the blessed saints who have sent the Principe."

"We will go now to the Signorina's door," said Vanno.

"At once, Principe; but we will find it locked."

"How do you know that?"

"I have tried it, softly, more than once, both to-day and last night. Never once have the two left the Signorina alone. Always one was with her. Through the night the Signora was there — with the key turned. One only has come for meals."

"The gate, too, has been locked," said Vanno. "Is that a custom here?"

"No, Principe, it has always been open since I came to serve the Captain Hannaford. It is the only way of entrance, and there is no gate-bell. Not that people often come. But since the Signorina and her friends arrived, it has been locked. It is the Signora who has the key. She seemed to be afraid of thieves, though we have nothing here which thieves can take, unless she herself has brought it. I wondered at first how the Principe had got in, but as soon as he told me he was the betrothed of the Signorina, I knew he would not be stopped by a locked gate."

"I climbed over," Vanno admitted, simply. "Those people must have heard me ring the door-bell, I suppose?"

"It is likely. The Signorina's room is far away, but the bell makes a great noise."

As they talked in low voices which the echoes could not catch and repeat, Apollonia was conducting Vanno upstairs, through an upper hall, and along a corridor. At the end of this passage she paused, without speaking, and indicated a door. The Prince went close to it, and called in a clear

tone: "Mary, it's I, Vanno. I've come to find you and take you away."

There was no answer; but it seemed to him that there was a faint rustle as of whispering on the other side. He tried the handle. It did not yield; and Apollonia's yellow eyes sent out a flash of excited expectation. She looked an amazon, waiting the signal to fall upon an enemy.

"Lady Dauntrey, I ask that you will open the door," Vanno said.

Almost immediately a key turned in the lock, the door opened quickly, letting Eve Dauntrey step out, and was closed again by her husband. It would also have been locked, but before Dauntrey could turn the key, Vanno twisted the handle round violently, pushed the door back and thrust his foot into the aperture.

"Take care, Prince," Lady Dauntrey said softly. "You mustn't frighten her. I assure you we're acting for her good."

Her voice was so calm, so gentle and even sincere that in spite of himself Vanno was impressed. He ceased to push against the door, but kept his foot in the opening.

"We were so hoping you'd come," Eve went on, "and I wanted to send for you, but Mary refused. She said that even if you came she would not see you, because she had broken off the engagement, and never wished to meet you again."

"That was all a mistake," Vanno said. "I must see her."

"I quite understand how you feel," Lady Dauntrey agreed, soothingly, "but don't you think, as she's resting for the first time in more than thirty hours, you'd better let the poor child have her sleep out first? I don't know if you are aware that my husband is a doctor; but he is, and practised in South Africa, very successfully. He's with Mary now, and has helped me watch over her. The dear girl begged us to come here. She said there had been trouble between her and your brother and sister-in-law, so she couldn't stay at their villa. Afterward she told us about the broken engagement, and that explained the dreadful state of nervousness she was in from the moment she came to us at Monte Carlo, till she collapsed here, and became delirious. We have done our very best — and I'm so thankful to have been with her, though it was most inconvenient for our plans. We were just ready to start for England when she appealed to us not to let her come to this dreary, haunted sort of place by herself. I don't know what would have become of the poor darling if she'd been alone with this dreadful woman — almost a savage from the mountains, whom Captain Hannaford engaged as caretaker."

Eve talked rapidly and gravely, in a whisper. As she spoke of Apollonia, she turned a look upon her; and the woman "made horns" with two pointing fingers. Vanno knew well what this meant.

If Lady Dauntrey's story had begun to impress him, that glance thrown at Apollonia brought back in a flash all his enmity and suspicion. It was a mur-

derous look. He knew that she hated the woman for having brought him to the door of Mary's room.

He was silent for an instant when Eve ceased to speak. Then he said, "I won't disturb Mary. I will go in quietly and look at her while she sleeps."

"You may wake her."

"If she did not wake when I called, she won't wake at the sound of a footstep."

"But my husband—we ought to consult him——"

Before she could finish, Vanno pushed open the door, by virtue of his strength, which was far greater than that of Lord Dauntrey, who kept guard on the other side. Noiselessly the young man entered the room; and as Dauntrey realized that opposition would not avail, he gave way.

It was a large room, sparsely furnished, and so full of light that for a second or two Vanno was confused, after the dimness of the corridor outside. The huge window had no curtains, and the afternoon sunlight poured through it upon the bed which stood near by, facing the door. Mary's face lying low on the pillow was colourless as wax. The sun lit up her hair, and turned it to living gold.

Vanno saw only the bed, and Mary lying there asleep. He did not once look at Dauntrey, who stole out on tiptoe. Eve, waiting for her husband, put a finger to her lips. As Apollonia peered anxiously into the room, not daring to cross the threshold, Lord and Lady Dauntrey went softly away together, as if they were afraid that a creaking board under their feet might wake the sleeper

It seemed to Peter that she must have been waiting in Schuyler's automobile for an hour, when at last she saw a man and a woman walking quickly down the avenue, toward the gate. She had never seen Lord and Lady Dauntrey, but she knew that Rose Winter and Vanno believed them to be Mary's companions. In the hand of the woman was a small, rather flat bag of dark blue Russian leather, which might be a jewel-case or a miniature dressing-bag such as women carry when motoring.

The pair had come into sight rounding a turn of the drive; and they saw the girl looking up from the window of the waiting car at the moment when her eyes fell upon them. For an instant they slackened their pace, but the woman spoke to the man, and they came on steadily, walking as briskly as before. The man unfastened the gate with a big key, which he left in the lock, and the two stepped out into the road. They glanced casually at Peter, her chauffeur, and the motor, as if they would pass by, but on an impulse Peter leaned from the window and spoke. "Lord and Lady Dauntrey?"

"Yes," the woman replied, stiffly. "I'm afraid I don't remember ——"

"Oh, we've never met, but I knew you were both here, and I'm Mary Maxwell, Mary Grant's best friend. I'll go in and find her and Prince Vanno, now the gate's unlocked. I thought perhaps Mary was sending me out her jewel-case, as I see you have it in your hand."

This was a shot in the dark. All that Peter knew of the jewel-case was Rose Winter's description of it, when she told of Mary's arrival in her absence, to take it away; but Lady Dauntrey's face said that the shot had not gone wide of the mark.

"It is Miss Grant's jewel-case, certainly," she replied. "She put it in my charge. Prince Giovanni Della Robbia has insulted me and my husband, and we are going at once; but I'm too fond of poor Mary to leave her property at the mercy of the only servant in the house — a horrible woman, who would murder one for a franc. She knows about the jewels, and as the Prince won't look after them and Mary isn't able to, I meant to take them back to Mrs. Winter."

"How good of you! I'll save you the trouble," Peter said.

Lady Dauntrey looked at her with narrow eyes, Dauntrey standing apart listlessly. "I don't know you," Eve objected.

"You can ask Mr. James Schuyler's chauffeur about me," Peter suggested. "Or if you won't accept his word, wait a little while, and I'll take you both to Monte Carlo and Mrs. Winter's house, where I'm staying."

"I really think you had better trust this lady," Dauntrey said. He looked at his wife with his sad, tired eyes. Eve shrugged her shoulders, and handed Peter the bag. "Well, the responsibility is off my hands, anyhow!" she cried. "That's one comfort. And it's much more convenient for us not to go

to Monte Carlo, on other people's business. Mary Grant's jewels are nothing to us."

"Of course not," Peter agreed, pleasantly. "I hope Mary's well?"

"Then you'll be disappointed," Eve replied, her eyes very bright. "She's far from well. My husband, an experienced doctor, has been treated unbearably by the Prince. You can bear witness that he leaves his patient only because he was insulted. I advise you, if you're fond of Mary Grant, to get in some one else, or it may be too late. It's impossible to know what she may have done, but my private opinion is that her love troubles were too much for her, and she took something ——"

"Eve!" Dauntrey stopped his wife. "Be careful what you say."

"Well, it's no longer our affair, since the Prince has taken matters into his own hands, and practically turned out Mary's best friends. Good afternoon, Miss Maxwell."

They walked off quickly, without looking back, the two tall figures marching shoulder to shoulder in the direction of Latte, the nearest railway station.

"You oughtn't to have said what you did," Dauntrey reproached Eve.

"I'm sorry," she replied. "That girl nearly drove me mad. To think she's got the jewels! Nothing to pay us for it all, except the money from the cheque."

"Serves us right," Dauntrey said grimly. "I'd thank God we're out of it at any price, if God was

likely to be looking after us. Better thank the devil."

"Don't talk like that," Eve implored him. "There's nothing against us, nothing. I'm sorry I blurted out that about her taking some stuff, but it can't do us any harm. You said yourself, nobody could find out what ——"

"They couldn't prove, but they might suspect. God! What hideous days! I never thought the stuff would act on her like that, or I wouldn't have let you persuade me ——"

"I know you wouldn't," Eve cut him short. "It was my fault. You thought there was only a slight risk ——"

"Yes, but it acted differently from the beginning. I didn't suppose it would send her to sleep. God knows I did everything I knew to wake her up ——"

"Well, we're out of it all now," Eve soothed him. "Remember, they can't prove anything. Even if they send after us, and make us come back, they'll have their trouble for their pains. We've been clever."

"You have!"

"Everything's for and nothing against us. Perhaps it's as well the fellow came, after all. He's given us our excuse to go in a hurry. And we've got money — in gold, no notes, thank goodness. Only — I shall dream of those jewels at night."

"Best to be rid of them, as things have turned out. If she'd given them to us, as you hoped, it would have been all right, but ——"

"No use crying over spilt milk," Eve sighed. "Let's walk faster. There ought to be a train for Genoa in twenty minutes, if your time-table is right. That reminds me, I never posted her letter to the convent, but it doesn't matter now."

Mary lay on her back between the pillows, her hair loose around her face, a thick plait of it tossed out over the faded green silk quilt. One arm supported her head, the other was hidden by the bed covering. The bright light that streamed through the window was an illumination.

Suddenly it was as if an iron hand seized Vanno's heart and slowly pressed the blood out of it. The thought had flashed into his head that she was more than ever before like a gentle and lovely Juliet, but Juliet in the tomb, her white beauty lit by many candles.

If she were dead — if those people had killed her ——

Never had Vanno seen any one sleep so soundly. There was no flicker of the eyelids, no quivering of the nostrils, no rising and falling of the breast. He laid his hand over her heart, and could not feel it beating, yet he was not sure that it did not beat very faintly. There were bounding pulses in his hand as he touched her. He could not tell whether it was his own blood that throbbed, or whether hers spoke to his, through living veins.

Very gently he lifted her head, and laying it down again, higher on the pillow whence it seemed to have

slipped, he moved the arm that had supported it. Then kneeling beside the bed, he kissed her hand again and again. It was very cold, cold as a lily, he thought, yet not so cold as a lily killed by the frost.

If some one had come to him at that moment and said, "Mary is dead," he would have believed that it was the truth, for she looked as if her eyes had seen the light beyond this world. She was not smiling, yet there was a radiance on her face which did not seem to be given by the sunset. Rather did the light appear to come from within. Yet, because no one said aloud the words that went echoing through his heart, Vanno would not believe that Mary was dead.

"If I have lost you in this world," he said aloud, as though she could hear him, "I will follow where you are, to tell you that we belong to one another through all eternity, and nothing can part us. But you haven't gone. You could not leave me so."

As he spoke to her, on his knees, her cold hand pressed against his warm throat, he kept his eyes upon her face, hungrily, watching for some sign that her spirit heard him from very far off. But there was no change. The dark, double line of her lashes did not break. Her lips kept their faint, mysterious half-smile.

Vanno resolved that if she had gone, he too would go, for without her the world was empty and dead.

It was then that Peter stole to the open door with Apollonia, and looked in. Her impulse was to cry out, and run into the room to sob at her friend's feet; but something held her back. It was as if she caught a strain of music; and she remembered the air. It came from the opera of "Romeo è Giuletta," which she had heard in New York a year ago. The music was as reminiscently distinct as if her brain were a gramophone. She had seen a tableau like this, of two lovers, while that music played in the theatre; and with tears in her eyes she had thought, "If only Romeo had waited, if he had had faith, he could have called her back again."

She did not enter the room, but standing by the door she said softly yet clearly, "Don't let her go. Call her spirit. Maybe it is near. Tell her that you are calling her back to happiness and love. I believe she will come to you, because you are her heart and her soul. I am going, and I will bring a doctor. But you are the only one who can save her now."

The girl's voice had no personality for Vanno. He did not turn his mind for an instant to Peter. It was as if his own thoughts spoke aloud and gave him counsel what to do.

He rose from his knees, and sitting on the side of the bed gathered Mary up into his arms. He held her closely against his breast, her hair twined in his clasping fingers. Then he bent his head over the upturned face, and whispered.

"Darling," he said, "heart of my heart, wherever you are have mercy and come back to me. I can't

live without you. You are my all. God will give you to me if you will come. You look so happy, but you will be happier with me, for you can't go and leave everything unfinished. Best and dearest one, I need you. Come back! Come back!"

Mary's spirit had crossed the threshold and stood looking out into the unknown, which stretched on and on into endlessness, like a sea of light ringing round the world; and in this sea there was music which seemed to be part of the light. She thought that she had been almost engulfed in a terrible storm with waves mountain-high arising over her head in a great darkness, and explosive noises of machinery loud in her ears as when Carleton took her through the water of the harbour in his hydro-aeroplane. But the noise had ceased, and the darkness was gone. All was light and peace. She was conscious that she had struggled and suffered, that she had borne a burden of unhappiness which had been too heavy for her shoulders. The burden had fallen off. She was no longer unhappy, and though her heart was empty of joy, dimly she seemed to hear an assurance that soon it would be filled to overflowing. The promise was in the music that was part of the light, and of the great sea over which she was passed. She knew that she was far above it now, and rising higher, as she had risen in the aeroplane when she had felt the wonder after the shrinking. But something which had been herself lay under the sea, down in the storm and the darkness she had left behind.

Then, suddenly, the music was disturbed. Through it she listened to a vague undertone of sorrow; and she became aware that some one was suffering as she had suffered, some one whom she had loved — some one whom she would always love. Out of the darkness a voice was calling her to come back. Indistinct and far away at first, it became clear, insistent, irresistible.

* * * * * * *

A faint shiver ran through Mary's body, and Vanno's heart leaped against her breast, as if he sent his life to warm her heart.

"Come back to me, if you loved me!" he called her.

Very slowly she opened her eyes, dazzled still with the light she had seen through the open door.

"Mary, come back and save me!" he cried to her out of the darkness.

"I am coming," she whispered, not sure if she was answering in a dream to a voice in a dream. But the light of the wondrous sea was dimmed to the light of an earthly sunset. Through it Vanno's eyes called to her as his voice had called — those eyes which had been her stars of love — and she forgot the brighter light, just seen and lost.

"You!" she said. "It's like — heaven ——"

"It is heaven — now," he answered, as he held her closely.

* * * * * * *

When Mary was well again, the curé married her to her Prince, and the two went together into the desert that Vanno loved. There it did not matter

to them that Angelo was thinking coldly and harshly of them both; and perhaps there was even an added sweetness in Mary's happiness because a sacrifice of hers could spare pain to one very near to Vanno. She would not let her husband say that he could not forgive his brother.

"But if our love is to be perfect, we must forgive Angelo, and poor Marie too," she told him.

Late in the summer (they had left Egypt long ago, and were in the high mountains of Algeria), one day a letter came to Vanno, forwarded on from place after place, where it had missed him. Angelo had written at last.

"Perhaps you may have seen," he said, "in some paper, that in giving me a little daughter my wife died. She left a letter to be handed me after her death, if a presentiment she had were fulfilled. If she had lived, I would have forgiven her. Will you and Mary forgive me?"

There was no question as to what their answer would be.

"When two people love each other as we do," Vanno said, "I see now that there can be no room for any bitterness in their hearts."

THE END



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